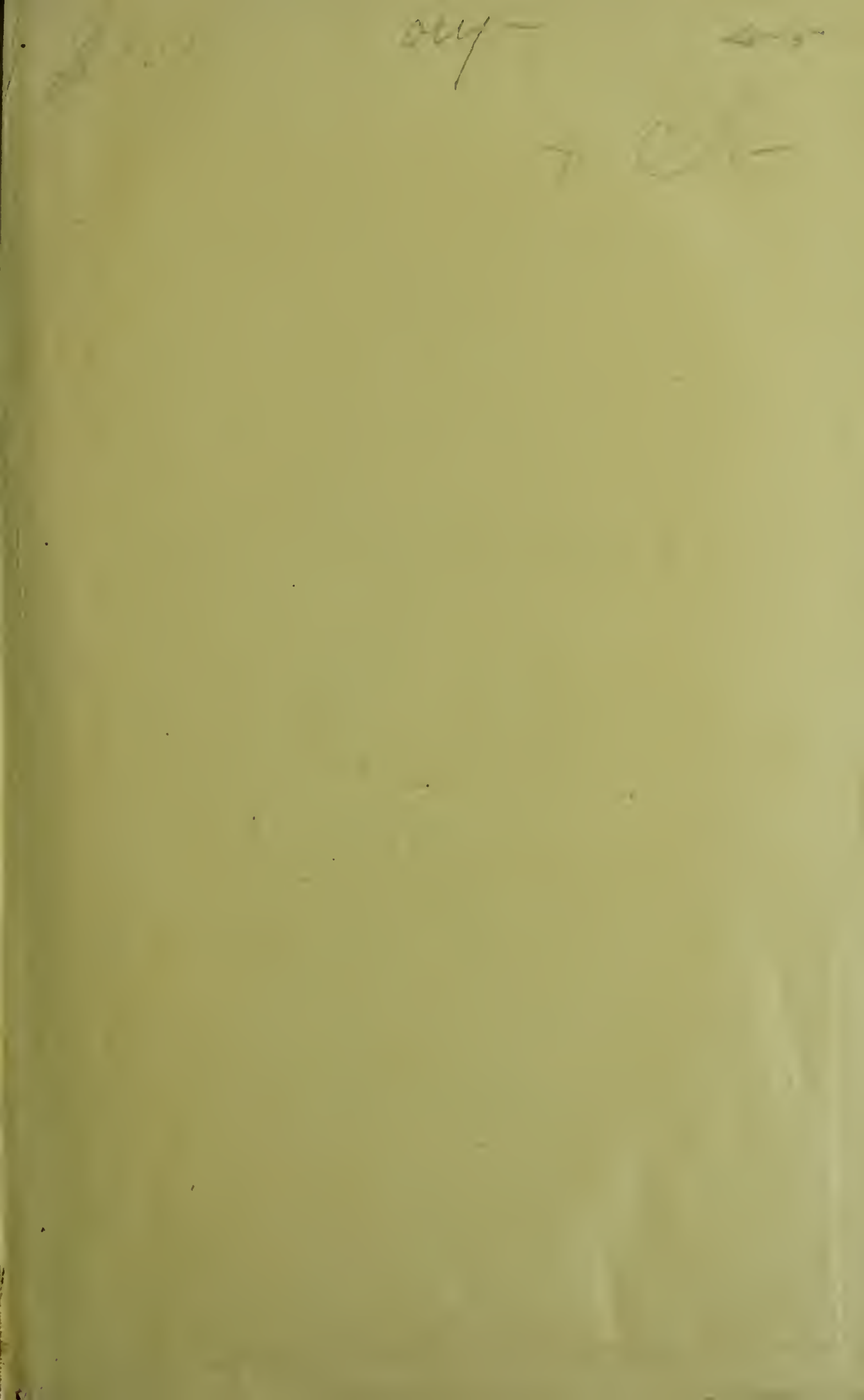


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LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THOMAS TEGG, 73, CHEAPSIDE.

1842.

LONDON:
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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE names of Doddridge and Orton were so intimately blended with the history and proceedings of dissenters in the early part of the last century, that it is matter of surprise, while several editions of the works of the first-named author have issued from the press, those of the latter have never been collected or published uniformly, up to the present period. . Whatever reason may be conjectured for this, it is certainly not for want of merit in the works themselves. The sound practical wisdom, the range of literary information, the deep tone of piety and devotedness, and above all, the amiable catholicity of temper which shone in every act of Mr. Orton's life, and breathed in his every word, ought to have secured a more favourable attention to his writings. It is however not difficult to assign a reason for this apparent neglect. It is a matter of notoriety that a large proportion of the old Presbyterian churches, the body of Christians with which Mr. Orton was for the greater part of his life associated, have ceased to recognize the peculiarities of the evangelical system : and it is a matter of history that the defection is to be dated from about the time when these good men flourished. But that the author of the volumes now presented to the public either adopted or disseminated erroneous notions on the vital doctrines of the gospel, it would take an eagle's eye to discern, and an acute logician to prove. Let the most suspicious reader peruse these volumes, and we dare challenge him to adduce a single passage, in which there can be fairly traced a leaning towards those derogatory views of the deity of Christ, or the expiatory character of his atonement, which, having been embraced by many of the modern Presbyterian churches, have deprived them of all evangelical vitality, and left them a barren stump, a beacon and warning to future ages. The only fault appearing to attach to such men as Orton, Doddridge, and others,

was, that in the almost boundless reach of their charity, they opened a door, at which, in a stealthy moment, error was permitted to enter. Their temper was too generous to suspect, and their candour too sincere to discourage, the first approaches of error; and the subsequent history of the body with which they were associated affords another painful illustration, how the artful patron of error can insinuate his poison under the garb of truth, and beneath the shade of a virtuous simplicity.

Under the impulse of this generosity of spirit, Mr. Orton maintained a close intimacy with the most pious and learned men of his time in all sections of the Christian church; and among these were some of the most learned members of the established church. Of their approbation of his writings many instances might be given, in addition to those specified in page xiii. *infra*: two or three only are subjoined.*

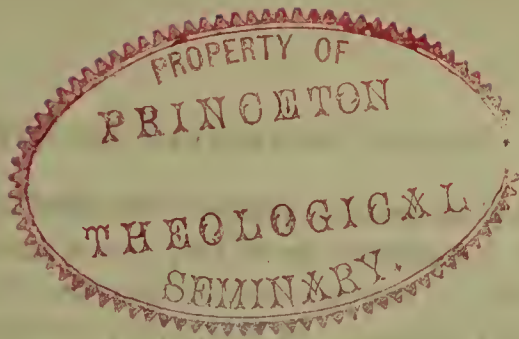
* The Rev. Mr. HUNTER, vicar of Weaverham, in Cheshire, says in reference to his Sacramental Meditations, "I never read a book better calculated for the purposes of spiritual improvement. The shortness of the sections, the plainness of the style, the clearness of the method, render it peculiarly fit for the reading and retention of the uninstructed in low, and the indolent in high life; whilst a flow of piety, an apt and happy application of scripture, an experimental sense of religion, and a profound knowledge of the divine life, and of the deep things of God, must recommend it to the perusal and approbation of those who have made the greatest progress in goodness."

DR. TUCKER, dean of Gloucester, wrote as follows to a friend:—"Pray thank Mr. Orton for his book in my name. I am charmed, and I hope edified too with it; which I make my constant companion. As I read I am delighted to find the great divine and the able controversialist concealing himself under the better character of the pious and humble Christian, and avoiding all the parade of human learning."

DR. ADAMS, master of Pembroke College, Oxford, says in a letter to Mr. Orton, "The design of your book was quite new to me, and is, I think, happily executed. In our large communions (such as I have often seen at St. Chad's) it is the very book I should wish in every one's hands."

The following extract closes a review of Mr. Orton's Letters in the British Critic, vol. xxxi. p. 210, and we cite it, because that Journal was under the able editorship of Mr. (afterwards Archdeacon) Nares, whose character for learning, orthodoxy, and candour, is too well known to need any commendation.

"When we take up the writings of dissenters so generally sound in Christian principles as Mr. Orton was, we feel a sensible pang in the reflection that through the infirmity of human nature, such persons should be kept apart from the church by opinions, very few, if any, of which affect fundamentals. We rejoice when we see them so very nearly approaching to us, yet how to remove the obstacles that still prevent union, is a problem which He only can solve who reads the human heart, and knows its most secret movements. May He in his good time effect it; in the mean while *ἡ φιλαδελφία μείτω*,—let all harshness, all mutual hatred and suspicion, every thing that tends to generate or continue such feelings, be dismissed by both sides."



MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. JOB ORTON.

JUST in proportion to the value we attach to the writings of any author, will be the interest we feel in his public and private history. This simple fact is at once the cause and the motive why the collected works of any author appear meagre and unfinished without some particulars, more or less detailed, of his personal history. The materials respecting the life and character of Mr. Orton were so diligently collected by Dr. Kippis, who had been one of his pupils, and published soon after his decease, that little more is necessary than to abridge what was then given in detail, adding what may have been published in other sources.

Dr. Kippis states that in a memorial Mr. Orton drew up for the use of his own nephews he gave them the following information concerning his family.

“They will find no lords and knights, or persons of distinguished rank, wealth, or station, among their progenitors. But they will learn (as far as I am capable of judging, by the best information I could gain, and the knowledge of those whom I remember,) that there is no one, either male or female, in the line of their direct ancestors for many generations, but hath been truly serious, pious, and good, and filled up some useful station in society with honour.” His grandfather and father, who were grocers at Shrewsbury of considerable property, were justly held in estimation for their piety, their good sense, their generosity, their usefulness, and their Christian virtues in general. The younger Mr. Orton added to his other valuable qualities the benefit of a liberal education, and an extensive acquaintance with books. The eldest son Job, the subject of the present note, was born on the 4th of September, 1717, and was early taught to pray, to read the scriptures, and to keep holy the Sabbath-day. At a proper age he was sent to the Free-school of his native place, where he went through the whole course of grammatical education, having staid there somewhat more than eight years.

Here he enjoyed as great advantages for classical knowledge as in most public schools, but suffered, he tells us, "not a little in the most important interests, by the examples and temptations of some boys who were very wicked and profane." In May, 1733, he left the school, and went to Warrington, under the care of Dr. Charles Owen, the dissenting minister of that town, who usually had two or three young men under his tuition. Mr. John Ashworth, the eldest brother of the late Dr. Caleb Ashworth, of Daventry, and who afterwards preached with Dr. Foster, in London, and died young, was Mr. Orton's only fellow-student. This situation was to Mr. Orton an agreeable transition from his father's house to that of a large seminary. He and his fellow-pupil were treated by their tutor more like his own children, than with the discipline necessary in an academy. Dr. Owen was a gentleman of considerable learning, great piety, and one of the most amiable men ever known for a polite behaviour, sweetness of temper and manner, and a genteel address. Mr. Orton continued with him a year, after which he spent the month of June, 1734, in the family of Mr. Colthurst, a most excellent and worthy minister at Whitchurch, in Shropshire. There, by the advice and encouragement of Mr. Colthurst, he first joined in the Lord's Supper, and devoted himself to a sincere compliance with the obligations of Christianity. In August, 1734, he went to Northampton, under the care of Dr. Doddridge, where he continued above seven years, with the intermission of about seven months in the year 1736, and the beginning of 1737, which, on account of the ill state of his health, he was obliged to spend at home. This time, however, was not quite lost, as his father kept him as close to reading and study as he thought was consistent with a due regard to his recovery. Before young Mr. Orton went first from home, he had been bound apprentice to his father, that, in case he should not incline to any of the learned professions, he might be a freeman of the town of Shrewsbury, and be able to engage there in business; but his inclinations were always to the Christian ministry. To this he might be led, by observing the very respectful, obliging, and affectionate manner, in which his grandfather and father always behaved to worthy ministers, and the honourable terms in which they always spoke of them. Indeed the houses of the two Ortons were the places where not only the dissenting clergy, but several of the church of England were usually entertained in the most hospitable manner, when they came to Shrewsbury. But though this circumstance gave the first turn to the inclinations of young Orton, he soon formed his resolutions for the ministry upon better motives. It was his desire to devote himself to the service of the sanctuary, with a view to the religious improvement and everlasting happiness of mankind: and to qualify himself for this great work were all his studies directed. In a few weeks after he went to Northampton, he had made himself so perfect a master of Rich's

short-hand, which his tutor wrote, that he could take down the whole of most of the sermons which he heard.

Such were the ability and diligence with which Mr. Orton pursued his literary course, that in March 1738—1739 he was chosen assistant to Dr. Doddridge in the academy; and he began his lectures in this capacity, with reading to the junior students in the classics and geography. About the same time he was examined before a committee of pastors in the neighbourhood, as to his qualifications for the ministerial office, and received an ample testimony of satisfaction and approbation. His first sermon was preached at Welford, in Northamptonshire, on the 15th of April, 1739. After this he continued to preach occasionally in all the neighbouring congregations, excepting on the first Sunday in every month, when he generally assisted Dr. Doddridge at Northampton. During the vacations, which lasted two months, the doctor continued at home in the former month, while Mr. Orton paid a visit to his friends and relations at Shrewsbury. In the second month he returned to Northampton, and took care of the family, the congregation, and such of the pupils as remained, whilst the doctor made his excursions to London, or other places.

In this early part of his life, Mr. Orton was honoured with many testimonies of his acceptableness as a preacher. He received several invitations from the congregations at Welford, Rowell, and Harborough, to settle with them as their minister: and he was applied to, likewise, by the dissenting society at Salters' Hall, London, to preach there as a candidate; but he thought it best to decline these applications, as, while he was assistant at Northampton, he was engaged in a very useful employment, and had daily opportunities of improving himself, superior to what he should have had in any other station. The enjoyment which he had of Dr. Doddridge's conversation was esteemed by him as a most peculiar advantage.

In April, 1741, died Mr. Berry, the minister of the presbyterian meeting at Shrewsbury; and about the same time Mr. Dobson, the pastor of the independent church in that town, to which Mr. Orton's father belonged, removed to Walsall, in Staffordshire. These two societies being thus vacant, concurred in an invitation to Mr. Orton to accept the pastoral charge among them, promising that in that case they would unite together in one congregation. The circumstance of such a pleasing coalescence of two different denominations of Christians, the unanimity of the application, and the prospect of an agreeable settlement, and of a considerable sphere of usefulness, induced him to accede to the proposal, though he did it with fear and trembling, as a prophet hath not, in general, equal honour in his own country, and among his own kindred, with what he meets with in another place. In October, 1741, he removed to Shrewsbury, and on the 18th of that month preached his first sermon

to the united congregations. On the 18th of the next month he had the misfortune to lose his father, who died at the age of fifty-two. This event was not only a great personal affliction to Mr. Orton, but brought upon him such a weight of cares, in addition to his various duties as a minister, that his health was materially injured; the consequence of which was, that he was laid under the necessity of having an assistant. He was obliged, likewise, in September, 1742, to go to Bath, by which he found some relief. The person chosen to be his assistant was Mr. Francis Boulton, who continued at Shrewsbury till the end of the year 1745, when he removed to Wrexham, in Denbighshire. On the 18th of September, in the same year, Mr. Orton was solemnly ordained to the pastoral office. The sermon and charge that were delivered upon the occasion were printed, and the testimonial was signed by a great number of pastors. Thirty ministers were present at the service. Upon the removal of Mr. Boulton to Wrexham, Mr. Moses Carter was chosen assistant to Mr. Orton, and accepted the invitation, but died in 1747. He was a man of uncommon ability, and his early death was greatly to be regretted. In 1746 Mr. Orton was invited by the congregation of the new meeting in Birmingham, to be their co-pastor with Mr. Bourn. Though he had a high esteem for the people of that society, he did not dare to undertake so much work as was necessary in the situation; besides which, he was comfortable and useful where he was already settled. The invitation from Birmingham was signed by nine of the principal persons of the congregation, who were a committee to manage their church affairs. In 1748 Mr. Joseph Fownes was chosen Mr. Orton's assistant, and the connexion was highly agreeable to both of them, they having always lived together in the utmost harmony and friendship. By Dr. Doddridge's death which happened as before related, Mr. Orton lost his much-honoured tutor, father, and friend. "The great and truly paternal tenderness," says Mr. Orton (in the memorial from which we write), "he had shown to me from my first coming under his care, and the uncommon confidence which he had in some instances reposed in me, led me to the highest respect and warmest affection for him. His appointing me in his will to preach his funeral sermon was a signal honour to me; and as he left me all his papers which I chose, I thought myself under particular obligations to attempt to give the world an account of his life and character and writings, which I at length effected. I do not repent the pains spent in this work for several years, though hurtful to my health, because I hope, and believe, it hath been, and will be, of great use to young ministers, and others who read it. It was soon after its publication translated into German, and a copy sent me from Riga, from an eminent divine there, who translated and published my Sermons on Eternity. But Doddridge's life was translated by Mr. Lindner, a young Lutheran divine of Sachsenhausen, in Saxony."

In March, 1751—2, Mr. Orton was invited to assume the pastoral charge of the congregation belonging to his late friend at Northampton. Upon this his people at Shrewsbury were alarmed; and, apprehending that he might listen to the application, they sent him a most respectful, affectionate, and unanimous address, to entreat that he would not leave them. A separate address, to the same purpose, was made to him by the young persons of the society. He had no inclination to quit a situation in which he was comfortable and useful; especially as there were some circumstances at Northampton that were of a discouraging nature. Nevertheless, he thought it a proper piece of respect to take some time to consider of the invitation, which at length he declined.

Not long after this event, another attempt was made to draw Mr. Orton from Shrewsbury. He was applied to by a considerable congregation in Westminster, to succeed their late pastor the Rev. Dr. Obadiah Hughes; but he immediately rejected the proposal, as he never had any inclination to settle in London, and as he was firmly persuaded that neither his health, nor his abilities, nor his sentiments, qualified him for a situation in the metropolis. In the two last particulars he was undoubtedly mistaken. Whether London would have been favourable to his health, might justly be questioned, but as to his abilities and sentiments, they would have enabled him to appear with distinguished advantage in the pulpit. His popularity, too, would have been of a substantial and durable kind, not founded on external and artificial accomplishments, but on discourses that were practical, serious, evangelical, and pathetic, accompanied with a plain, unaffected, and manly delivery, which irresistibly commanded attention. There was one respect, in which, perhaps, he was not so well fitted for London, and that was in his recluse mode of living, which grew upon him as he advanced in years, and his health declined, and which rendered him very particular and exact in his time of dining, and very cautious, not to say fastidious, in his reception of visitors. The congregation at Westminster, which was refused by him, was supplied at Midsummer, 1753, by Dr. Kippis.

From this time nothing material occurred, in the course of Mr. Orton's ministry at Shrewsbury, till the year 1765. He was comfortable and happy among his people, and in the friendship and assistance of Mr. Fownes. But in that year his bodily infirmities had so far advanced upon him that he was quite disabled from continuing in his public work. On the 15th of September, therefore, (which was his birth-day) he delivered his last sermon to his congregation. The Lord's Supper was administered by him several times after this; but he durst not undertake to preach any more.

Mr. Orton's quitting his pastoral connexion with the dissenters at Shrewsbury was attended with unhappy consequences. A contest arose

with respect to the choice of an assistant to Mr. Fownes, which at length ended in a separation. The larger number of the society thought it their duty to provide themselves with another place of worship; and with these Mr. Orton concurred in opinion. He esteemed himself bound to countenance them upon every principle of conscience, as a Christian, a dissenter, a minister, and a friend to liberty. Though Mr. Fownes continued at the old chapel, the circumstance did not occasion any diminution in the friendship and affection subsisting between him and Mr. Orton. The height to which the matter was carried rendered Mr. Orton's situation at Shrewsbury greatly uncomfortable, and materially affected his health. He found it necessary, therefore, to retire to another place, and at length he fixed at Kidderminster, to which he was principally led, that he might have the advice of a very able and skilful physician (Dr. Johnstone, afterwards of Worcester), who always proved himself a faithful and tender friend. To the care of Dr. Johnstone, Mr. Orton, under God, owed his life, and, from the regard and affection of the same gentleman, he derived some of the greatest present consolations of his existence. It was on the 26th of October, 1766, that he came to Kidderminster, and there he continued for the remainder of his days. His residence in that town was as comfortable as he could hope for in a place comparatively strange to him, and among persons with most of whom he had no previous acquaintance.

Though Mr. Orton was prevented by the bad state of his health from ever again appearing in the pulpit, he still retained the same zeal for promoting the great objects of the Christian religion. What he could not perform as a preacher, he was solicitous to effect as a practical writer. The following words were written by him in the bible which he commonly used in his study: "*Si non concedatur ut præco sim publicus, sin tamen operarius: quod publicé non possum, faciam [ut licet, valet] privatim. Quod non possum prædicando, præstem scribendo. Auxiliare, Domine, servum senilem.*" His whole conduct was in full conformity to these pious wishes.

Mr. Orton had not appeared much from the press, previously to his resignation of the pastoral office. His only publications before that period were his funeral sermon for Dr. Doddridge, printed in 1752;* a fast sermon, in 1756, occasioned by the earthquake at Lisbon, entitled, *Noah's Faith and Obedience to the Divine Warnings*, and his *Preservation from the Deluge Considered*,† and *Three Discourses on Eternity*,‡ and the *Importance and Advantage of Looking at Eternal Things*,‡ published in 1764. These three discourses have gone through several editions, and have been translated into Welsh. Such was Mr. Orton's ill state of health, together with his attention to the duties of his profession, that it was not till 1766 that he was enabled to give to the

* Vol. i. p. 567 of this edition.

† Vol. i. p. 583.

‡ Vol. i. p. 528.

world his *Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Writings, of Dr. Doddridge*. In 1769 he published a set of sermons, under the title of *Religious Exercises recommended; or, Discourses on Secret and Family Worship, and the Religious Observation of the Lord's Day*, with two Discourses on the Heavenly State, considered under the Idea of a Sabbath.* In 1771 Mr. Orton published *Discourses to the Aged*;† the subjects of which were admirably adapted to the situation of the persons for whom they were intended. All these discourses indeed breathe an excellent spirit, and show an earnest desire in the writer to advance the interests of genuine piety and practical religion. Our author's next publication, which appeared in 1774, was entitled, *Christian Zeal; or, Three Discourses on the Importance of seeking the Things of Christ more than our own*.‡ At a time when many valuable treatises had been published in defence of toleration and liberty, he thought there was great room to complain of the want of zeal for the support and advancement of real practical religion, and for the good of souls. To revive, therefore, this zeal, was the object of the discourses in question. In 1775 Mr. Orton committed to the press three further discourses, under the title of *Christian Worship*;§ the subjects treated of in this piece, which has been translated into Welsh, are the profitable hearing of the word; the joining in public prayer; and the singing of the praises of God. Two volumes of *Discourses on Practical Subjects*,|| were the production of the next year. The sermons are thirty-six in number, and testify, in the strongest manner, the ardent solicitude with which the author endeavoured to inspire mankind with the principles of piety and virtue. Mr. Orton's last publication, which appeared in 1777, was entitled, *Sacramental Meditations; or, Devout Reflections on various Passages of Scripture, designed to assist Christians in their Attendance on the Lord's Supper, and their Improvement of it*.¶ These meditations, which are fifty in number, are all founded on different texts of the sacred writings, and are what the author himself used in the administration of the sacrament, according to the method observed among dissenters from the Church of England. "The reader," say the *Monthly Reviewers*, "will not find in this work any rapturous flights, or wild chimeras; he will meet with nothing but what is rational and pious, tending to form the heart to the love of God, and to the practice of what is excellent and praiseworthy."

Several eminent divines of the establishment expressed their high approbation of the *Sacramental Meditations*; particularly the Rev. Mr. Hunter, vicar of Weaverham in Cheshire, and the author of several ingenious publications, Dr. Tucker, dean of Gloucester, and Dr. Adams, master of Pembroke College, Oxford.

* Vol. ii. p. 1.
§ Vol. i. p. 459.

† Vol. i. p. 323.
|| Vol. i. p. 1.

‡ Vol. i. p. 491.
¶ Vol. ii. p. 161.

Besides these several publications, all of which appeared with his name, Mr. Orton, in 1770, was the author of two anonymous tracts, entitled *Diotrephes Admonished*, and *Diotrephes Re-admonished*. They were written in defence of his excellent friend Dr. Adams, at that time vicar of St. Chad's, Shrewsbury, who had been violently attacked by some of the high-flown Calvinistical Methodists, and especially by the writer of a piece, which made a considerable noise in its day, called, "*Pietas Oxoniensis*."*

There is one small publication by Mr. Orton, which we have omitted to mention in its proper place. It was the earliest piece printed by him, having first appeared in 1749, and, we apprehend, without his name. The title of it is, *A Summary of Doctrinal and Practical Religion*, by way of Question and Answer, with an Introduction, showing the Importance and Advantages of a Religious Education.† So well has this tract been received, that it has gone through numerous editions.

We shall conclude our account of Mr. Orton's writings, by a brief notice of his posthumous works. In the course of his ministerial service, he delivered a short and plain exposition of the Old Testament, with devotional and practical reflections; which exposition and reflections were published from the author's manuscripts, for the use of families, by the Rev. Robert Gentleman of Kidderminster, Worcestershire, in six large volumes octavo. The first volume appeared in 1788, and the last in 1791. This work met with a very favourable reception on its first publication and is calculated for general utility. Of the notes it cannot be said that they are eminently critical; but they often convey valuable instruction; and the reflections are admirably adapted to promote the purposes of devout feeling.

Another production of Mr. Orton that has been given to the public, is, *Letters to a Young Clergyman*, 12mo, 1791.‡ Mr. Stedman, to whom these letters were written, performed an acceptable service in committing them to the press. The advice contained in them is, in general, excellently fitted for the direction and improvement of the younger clergy of every denomination. In 1806 were published, *Letters to Dissenting Ministers, &c.* to which are prefixed *Memoirs of his Life*, by S. Palmer.§

Besides Mr. Orton's publication of Dr. Doddridge's Hymns, and of the last three volumes of the *Family Expositor*, he printed, in 1764, a new edition of the *Life and Death of Mr. Philip Henry*, and prefixed to it an address to the descendants of that eminently pious and worthy divine. Of religious biography our author was particularly fond, and he was a great admirer of the two Henrys, Philip and Matthew. Mr.

* See vol. ii. page 488, note.

† Vol. ii. p. 325.

‡ Vol. ii. p. 411.

§ Dissenting minister at Hackney, and author of the *Nonconformist's Memorial*. See vol. ii. page 491.

Matthew Henry's Exposition was read by Mr. Orton in his family, and he had a most happy faculty, while he was doing it, of abridging that diffuse writer. He had been solicited, during his retirement, to form a regular abridgment of Henry's expositions; but his increasing infirmities obliged him to decline the employment.

The nature of Mr. Orton's writings was such as to render them acceptable to serious persons of different denominations. Dr. Tucker highly approved of them, and said that his sermons were the sermons to do good. Indeed the dean had such a respect for the judgment of Mr. Orton, that he submitted some of his own works to his correction. Dr. Adams read Mr. Orton's sermons in his family at Oxford. It is still more remarkable, that our author's extempore prayers were exceedingly admired by clergymen of the Church of England, who must, in general, be supposed to give a decided preference to pre-composed forms. The Rev. Dr. Stonhouse, rector of Great and Little Cheverel, Wiltshire, being at Mr. Orton's house, and joining in his family-worship, was so struck with the propriety and pertinency of his prayer, that he thanked him for it, and told him that it deserved to be written in letters of gold. "I have often," says Mr. Stedman, "learnt my duty from his prayers." A close friendship subsisted between Dr. Stonhouse and Mr. Orton, and the latter wrote an excellent letter to the former, on the death of a daughter. It was printed for private use, under the title of *A Letter from a Minister to One in Affliction*.*

After the publication of the *Sacramental Meditations*, in 1777, Mr. Orton's bad state of health no longer permitted him to instruct and edify the world from the press. But he still continued to be useful by his pious example, his affectionate exhortations, and his correspondence with his intimate friends. In 1781, he made a present to the library belonging to the schools of Shrewsbury, of Dr. Kennicott's Hebrew bible, superbly bound. It was accompanied by an inscription, for which see vol. ii. p. 487 of the present edition.

Mr. Orton had before this made some valuable presents of books to the same library. As in the inscription he is styled S. T. P. it is proper to take notice, that the degree of doctor in divinity had been conferred upon him many years previously to his decease; but he would never permit himself to be addressed by that title, or prefix it to any of his writings.

In the spring of the year 1783 Mr. Orton's complaints multiplied so fast upon him, that there was no prospect of his continuing much longer in life. Whilst he was in this situation, a long and affectionate letter was written to him by Mr. Fownes, and conveyed by Mr. Stedman.

Somewhat more than a month after the receipt of this letter, Mr. Orton departed this life at Kidderminster, on the 19th of July, 1783,

* Vol. ii. p. 670.

and in the sixty-sixth year of his age. On the 25th of the same month, agreeably to his own request, he was buried in Mr. Bryan's grave, in the chancel of St. Chad's, Shrewsbury. Mr. Bryan had been formerly vicar of St. Chad's, but had been ejected from his living in 1662. Near the spot a neat monument has been erected to Mr. Orton's memory.

With regard to the notice to be taken of him after his decease, Mr. Orton left the subsequent directions in his will. "I desire Messrs. Fownes and Lucas would preach the following sabbath to their respective congregations, or to each other's, from 1 Tim. ii. 12. But I desire they would say nothing of me, but exhibit the glory of the gospel, and the honour of the Christian ministry. Only let them assure my former hearers, that serving them in all their interests, especially their best, was the delightful business of my life; that all my time and studies were directed that way; and that if they retain any gratitude and respect to me, they would show it by their holy conversation, and by esteeming their present pastors highly in love for their work's sake; by their wise and faithful improvement of their labours, and by their candour and love one to another." Mr. Fownes's sermon was published.

Our author's talents as a preacher have been thus delineated by Mr. Fownes: "Mr. Orton was master of a great variety of styles, and I have frequently heard him, in the course of his public services, adopt them all with success. But the general character of his preaching was rather of a practical, serious, and affectionate turn, than distinguished by laboured and long-continued trains of reasonings. The didactic manner, like that of a parent addressing his children, or an instructor his pupils, was that which seemed most adapted to his taste and inclination; and though he acquitted himself with general acceptance in all the methods in which he addressed his hearers, it was in that he chiefly excelled."

Were it necessary, it would be easy to produce the testimonies of Doctors Kennicott, Adams, and Tucker, with several others given by eminent men, both of the establishment, and among the dissenters; for, to use the language of the apostle, "he had a good report of all men, and of the truth itself."

ERRATA.

Vol. i. p. 171, for *hope* read *home*, p. 346, for *Psalm* xii. read *Psalm* xcii.

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DISCOURSES

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

And Jesus said, Let her alone ; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me : she hath done what she could.—MARK xiv. 6—8.

And the Lord said unto David, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.—1 KINGS viii. 88.

P R E F A C E.

I HAVE often been much affected with recollecting an observation which I have met with in the heathen philosophers, I think both Plato and Tully, that no citizen, not even the meanest, should fail to promote the service of the state in which he lives, by such ways and means as fall within his power. A higher authority hath enjoined us to “do good to all men as we have opportunity.” There is no better way of serving the state to which we belong, than by promoting the interests of true religion in the hearts of our fellow-subjects. I should be glad to attempt this by preaching the word of life, and inculcating its great truths and duties in Christian assemblies. But Providence having deprived me of the ability of so doing, I am desirous to attempt it in this method. The honesty, benevolence, and I hope piety of the intention, will be, to candid minds, an apology for the defects of the execution. Almost every one forms a judgment of sermons, not according to the discourses themselves, but according to his own taste and sensations; and some may derive much advantage from those, which have no effect upon others. As God, in the course of his providence, hath made provision for gratifying the different natural tastes and relishes of mankind, so he hath furnished his ministers with different abilities and methods of address to suit their mental relishes. It seems, therefore, agreeable to his wise plan, and to the state and circumstances of men, that discourses of different kinds and strains should be addressed to them; and all may, through his blessing, contribute to the general edification and happiness. There were particular reasons for selecting some of the following discourses, which are not worth troubling the reader with. It may suffice to observe, that some of my friends, who found benefit by some of them, desired their publication. Others of them seem peculiarly suited to the character and circumstances of the present generation; and therefore they have a place in this volume. Most of the subjects indeed are rather uncommon; and not often treated in the pulpit, or from the press; but they are all practical, important, and useful. The former cir-

cumstance may be likely to attract the notice of some readers ; and the latter will, I hope, engage the attention of all, into whose hands they may come. Some of these discourses contain advices, directions, and cautions, which probably some worthy ministers, in particular situations, would not think it prudent to give from their pulpits, though they may esteem them very interesting. In this respect I would speak for them, and further the general good intention of their public and private exhortations. The plain language and familiar phrases to be found in some of these discourses, are not indeed suited to the general taste of the age, or the particular tastes of some readers of practical books. But it appears to me extremely evident, that we have carried our refinement of public discourses too far ; so that they are above the capacities, and not suited to the feelings, of most of our hearers and readers. The state of religion, in the age in which we live, requires something more plain, familiar, and striking, than is often to be met with in modern sermons. The want of “coming home to men’s business and bosoms,” to use Lord Bacon’s language, will, in some measure, account for the too general neglect of the ministrations of some regular, judicious, and even serious preachers ; and for the eagerness with which multitudes run after preachers of a different sort. I would acknowledge with great thankfulness, that those peculiarities in my manner of address, to which some may be ready to object, have been the means of fixing serious impressions of divine things upon some persons. And they have remembered, acted upon, and inculcated upon their families and others, some advices and maxims which have been in this manner addressed to them : while others of my discourses, which might seem better suited to the taste of the age, have, as far as I can judge, been soon forgotten and quite unprofitable. This will, I hope, be a sufficient apology for the manner in which some important duties are here urged. I hope these discourses will furnish many Christian families with entertainment and religious instruction, when read to them on a Lord’s day ; as they are neither long, nor, I hope, tedious. I wish they may be comfortable and profitable to those who, while Providence detains them from public worship, may peruse them in their devout retirements.

I commend these discourses to the candid and serious perusal of those into whose hands they may fall. And may the gracious Head of the church, who doth not disdain a mite cast into his treasury, or any honest though feeble attempt to serve his sacred cause, prosper this ; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that, during ten years of weakness and incapacity for the public services of the Christian ministry as on this day, I have not been quite useless to mankind.

Kidderminster, Sept. 15, 1775.

J. O.



DISCOURSES ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

DISCOURSE I.

THE JOY OF ANGELS AT THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

JOB xxxviii. 7.

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

THE scriptures were not designed to gratify our curiosity, but to enlighten our understandings and regulate our tempers and lives. They do not therefore give us a particular account of the several orders of beings superior to man, but only hint to us, that there are such beings, and give us a general view of their nature, employment, and felicity. These general hints well deserve our consideration; as they will furnish an agreeable entertainment to minds that are not wholly sensual and wrapt up in earthly views and interests, and may answer some important religious purposes. It is certainly our duty to reflect upon what is recorded in scripture concerning the angels; both because they have considerable connexion with our world, and "minister to the heirs of salvation;" and because their example is proposed to our imitation. Our text is, perhaps, the only passage of scripture which gives us any hint of their employment, before they were commissioned to execute part of the divine sentence upon fallen man: and it is the first act of worship we read of in the bible. After Job and his friends had been, in this sacred poem, long debating about the conduct of providence, the poet introduces the great Jehovah himself in all his majesty, demanding of Job a clear account of the mysteries of creation and providence; particularly where he was "when the foundations of the earth were laid," and this beautiful system formed with so much harmony and exactness: even then "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." For the illustration of this passage, I will consider,

I. The persons, or beings, here spoken of, and the meaning of the titles given them.

II. What occasioned their joyful songs. And then propose to your consideration, and urge upon your hearts, some useful lessons which may be drawn from these particulars.

I. *Let us consider the persons here spoken of, and the meaning of the titles given them.*

The persons here spoken of must undoubtedly be the *angels*, or those glorious spirits who were formed before the earth. Accordingly what is here rendered "sons of God," is in the Greek version rendered, "all my angels," and by an ancient Jewish paraphrase, "all the armies of heaven." The latter clause of the text explains the former; the "morning stars" are the same as the "sons of God;" except these two titles may denote different orders of those heavenly beings.

The angels are called "morning stars," and that with great propriety; not only as they were probably the first living creatures produced, the first-born of the Father of lights; but on account of their lustre and the purity of their natures. In scripture, persons of eminent stations are described as "stars." Thus, the king of Babylon, is styled, "Lucifer, son of the morning," or the morning star, Isa. xiv. 12. Whether the angels are pure spirits, without any thing corporeal or material about them, we cannot say. It seems rather the prerogative or peculiar glory of God to be a pure spirit. It is certain, they have sometimes put on corporeal vehicles or some sort of bodies, so as to be visible to human sense; as we read so frequently of their appearances in scripture. They are called "angels of light;" and the face of Stephen is said to shine "as the face of an angel." On account of the lustre of their appearance, and the purity of their natures, as spirits, and as holy spirits, they may be called morning stars. Thus the Lord of angels saith of himself, "I am the bright and morning star," Rev. xxii. 16. Further,

They are styled "sons of God."—Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fiery furnace one like "the Son of God," that is, as it is explained afterwards, an angel, Dan. iii. 25, 28. They are called sons of God, because produced by him, who is the Father of spirits, the Father of the whole family in heaven and earth. They may be so styled, because they resemble him in their natures, partake of his divine and glorious image; because they stand before his throne, and behold his face; are dear to him, and happy in his favour and friendship. And they may be called his *sons* also as men are; because he governs rational beings in a more excellent manner than he doth irrational ones; even by the obligations of reason, justice, gratitude, and ingenuity; and they are capable of rendering him praise, homage, and obedience. From hence it appears, that they are glorious and excellent beings, and every thing said in scripture concerning them claims our serious regard. Let us consider,

II. *What occasioned their joyful songs and shouts of praise.*

And it was the creation of the world ; of this system, comprehending the sun, and the earth, and other planets which revolve about the sun. This is plain from the context ; “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth ? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened, or who laid the corner-stone thereof ?” Then the angels sang together in concord and harmony. Every one bore a part in the triumph ; and the greatness of their joy was (to speak after the manner of men) expressed in songs and shouts of praise on this grand occasion. They rejoiced on account of the magnificence and beauty of the production itself—the glories of the great Creator displayed in it—and the uses for which it was designed. Let us just touch upon each of these thoughts.

1. The magnificence and beauty of the creation excited their joy.

The angels undoubtedly have just ideas of harmony, order, and beauty : and they discovered some glorious appearances of them in the formation of our world. They saw it at first a mere chaos, “without form and void :” the several elements mixed together, “and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” They heard the Almighty say, “Let there be light, and there was light :” the finer particles of matter, which made light and fire, were separated from the gross and dark ones ; spread through the whole system, but centred in the sun in the greatest abundance. They saw the foundations of the earth laid, and the several elements of air, earth, and water properly adjusted, the due bounds of each settled, and their respective places assigned : and this with such exactness, as if they had been weighed and measured, and a line had been stretched out to determine their proportion, distance, and extent ; (see verse 5,) “Who hath laid the measures thereof, or stretched the line upon it ?” They saw him “stretch out the north over the empty place, and hang the earth upon nothing,” Job xxvi. 7. They saw the other planets fixed in their proper orbs, and beginning their respective revolutions. How far this system of ours differs from others in its materials and texture, we cannot say. The angels, who were acquainted with other worlds, might perceive, that this was composed of different materials, and new elements, or the same ranged in a different order. And the sight of so much grandeur and beauty must fill their minds with great pleasure, and tune their voices to songs of joy.

2. The glories of the great Architect displayed in it excited their praise.

We know, as the apostle observeth, that “every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God,” Heb. iii. 4. “The invisible things of God are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are

made, even his eternal power and Godhead." The angels, the sons of God, who have a great zeal for his honour, must be delighted with every thing that displays his glorious perfections. These were most illustriously displayed in the formation of the world. It was an astonishing exploit of divine wisdom and power, to produce out of nothing the materials of which this world was composed, and to range them in their proper order. The angels saw, by the opening of the plan, the grandeur of the design; and as it was gradually carried into execution, they saw, with inexpressible wonder and joy, such beauty, harmony, and proportion in every part, as plainly showed boundless wisdom and almighty power. "He made the earth by his power, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding." They heard him speak, and saw that it was done; they heard him command, and they saw that it stood fast. They knew also, that nothing but goodness could dispose their Father to produce and people new worlds. And there appeared such evident marks of kind, as well as wise, design in the new production, as filled their hearts with rapture, and led them to glorify the Lord of hosts, who appeared "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Again, They rejoiced,

3. On account of the uses for which the earth was designed. The angels are benevolent beings, and bear the image of God in love. From a principle of benevolence, they would be pleased with the production of numerous tribes of living creatures to inhabit this world, and partake of the bounties of the universal parent. They would particularly rejoice in the formation of mankind, as resembling them in spiritual and immortal natures; and with sublime pleasure contemplate the abundant provision God had made for their support, convenience, and delight, and for diffusing happiness among millions of rational creatures. The angels themselves were well provided for, and dwelt in a glorious habitation above; but from a principle of generous love, they rejoiced in the formation of the earth as a habitation for men. It is probable that God, when he created the earth, gave them a general knowledge of some wonderful dispensations of providence towards its future inhabitants, and of the schemes he had formed for their everlasting salvation and happiness. This would increase their pleasure, and give new ardour to their songs of praise. They might be informed of the connexion they were to have with mankind, and the services in which they were to be employed for the benefit of their inferiors. But this would be no disagreeable intelligence to those celestial spirits, who are so entirely devoted to the honour of God, so ready to do his commands, so humble, and so benevolent. They would rejoice in the prospect of this employment, and long to be sent on some of these friendly errands. On these accounts, then, the angels sang together and shouted for joy at the creation of

the world, observing its magnificence and beauty—the glories of the divine Builder displayed in it—and being informed of the uses for which it was designed. Let me now propose to your consideration, and urge upon your hearts, some useful lessons, which may be drawn from hence.

APPLICATION.

1. *The creation was a glorious work, and claims our admiration and our praise.* We often judge of the beauty and excellency of a production, which we do not thoroughly understand, by the opinion of those who do understand it; by the degree in which they commend it, and the value they put upon it. But those who in the general may be good judges of any art or science, may be misled through some peculiar taste, affection, or prejudice. But were we less competent judges of the beauties and glories of the creation than we are, we might safely build our opinion upon that of the angels, for they are certainly good judges of it; since to be “as an angel of God to discern good and bad,” and to be “wise according to the wisdom of an angel of God,” are proverbial expressions in scripture for consummate wisdom, 1 Sam. xix. 17, 20. Some of the heathen philosophers endeavoured to infer, from what they thought the ill contrivance and manifold defects of the world, that God could not be the creator of it. And a profane prince once said, that “if he had been present when God made the world, he could have taught him to have done it better.” The angels, it seems, had a different idea of the work and its divine Author: and I presume you will pay a greater regard to their judgment, than that of a few ignorant, conceited, and presumptuous mortals. We may justly argue, that the creation is a glorious work, from the knowledge we have of the work itself, and from the architect of it. “I, saith the Lord, have made the earth, and created man upon it. I, even *my hands* have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded,” Isa. xlv. 12. We argue it, also, from the manner in which the holy angels were affected at its production. And shall not we join in their adoration and praise? We, to whom the earth is given for an habitation; for whose support and delight it was filled with so many good things; to whose authority the inferior creatures are made subject, and for whose use they were chiefly designed? How stupid must they be, who say, “There is no God;” who ascribe this wonderful production to chance, an unmeaning, ridiculous term! How evidently were the heathen without excuse (as the apostle argues) who did not “clearly see his eternal power and godhead by the things that are made; and who worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever,” Rom. i. 20, 25. Shall the angels admire and celebrate his work, and shall *man* be un-

affected with it? Shall man be silent, when not only his heavenly hosts, but "all his works, praise him in all places of his dominion?" Shall we be much affected with, and admire, instances of human skill; curious machines contrived by men, such as a clock or an orrery, yet live unaffected with the immense wisdom and power and goodness of God? This is beyond excuse stupid and unreasonable. The works of God should be observed and celebrated with joy and triumph by his reasonable creatures below, as well as those above. Let us adopt the language of the Psalmist, and say, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all! The earth is full of thy riches," Ps. civ. 24. When God had finished all the works of creation in six days, he rested on the seventh day and blessed and sanctified it. The ancient sabbath, to which the Christian Lord's day succeeded, was set apart for a commemoration of the wonders of creation: and to give us leisure to contemplate these wonders, and adore the Author of them. And it is suitable work for every day, especially every Lord's day. Let us then be often imitating the ardent piety of the angels, and saying as they do: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created," Rev. iv. 11. Again, Did the angels admire and adore the works of God? Then,

2. *The works of God are worthy our serious and diligent study.* A heathen philosopher observes, that "human nature would be a poor thing indeed, if men centred their views only in the things of this world: that for his part he chiefly valued his being, because he was capable of contemplating the 'starry heavens.'" And the Psalmist observes that, "the works of the Lord are great, honourable, and glorious, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein," Ps. cxi. 2, 3. The advice which Elihu gives Job is applicable to us, "Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold. Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off," Job xxxvi. 24, 25. The more attentively we study the works of God, the more glorious they will appear, and the more we shall magnify the divine artist. God approves and encourages our serious inquiries. He hath given us senses to discern his works; understandings to trace up effects to their causes. He hath implanted curiosity in us to excite us. It is our shame and our sin, that we so little study and admire those works of God, which filled the angels with wonder, transport, and harmony. Creation is a subject that comes recommended to us by a variety of forcible motives. Studying it is a duty we owe to God and ourselves. It will furnish our minds with the most innocent and noble entertainment. It will lead our thoughts to God; dispose us to love him and to adore him; to be grateful for his goodness to man, and to trust

in him, whose power and wisdom are infinite, and whose "tender mercies are over all his works." Add to this, that it will confirm our faith in the scriptures; in what they declare of his agency in creation, of his infinite perfections, his constant universal providence, his inexhaustible bounty, and the provision he hath made for the eternal happiness of the pious and good in a better world. Reason, and true philosophy, which is reason cultivated and employed, are friends to religion, and will dispose us heartily to receive the gospel, and to reverence, love, and obey that glorious Being, who "giveth us all things pertaining both to life and godliness." Again: Did the angels rejoice in the creation of God? We may infer,

3. *They must be grieved at every thing that defaces and dishonours the creation.* It is so full of wonders, that even the sagacious minds of angels are continually discovering new beauties and glories in it. And it must be offensive to them, when they see mankind acting like brutes; forgetting the Lord their Maker, and disregarding the operations of his hands. They must be grieved at the first apostasy of human nature; offended with every thing that defaces the beauty of the creation, and disturbs the harmony and order of the natural world. When the inferior creatures are cruelly treated, or abused to the injury of man, these pious and friendly beings must be displeased. When man, the chief of the lower creation, degrades his nature by intemperance and lust, or is overcharged with the cares of the world; when men bite, devour, and destroy one another, the angels must turn away their faces with shame and indignation. Indeed every sin is a blemish to the creation, and a disturbance of the good order in which the glorious maker of all things hath placed them. The angels must be particularly grieved, when ignorant, frail, and sinful men take upon them to censure the works and the providence of God, which they admire and adore. To reprove this error in Job and his friends, it is probable that the thought in our text was intended. The angels celebrated the works of God, which they were ready to quarrel with; and adored the providence, about which they were too proudly and uncharitably disputing. Let us then avoid every thing that would give pain to these superior intelligences; and with them, magnify what we know, and humbly reverence and adore what we cannot fully comprehend. Again: Did the angels rejoice at the first creation? We may infer,

4. *They would more rejoice in the new creation.* At the redemption of the world, which is described in scripture as "a new creation:" "For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I make all things new. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Redemption is creation more noble and sublime. It is creating anew degenerate hearts, and renewing them to the image of God. The first creation was chiefly a display of the

natural perfections of God, his power and wisdom. The new creation by Jesus Christ is chiefly a display of his moral perfections, his justice and patience, his faithfulness and goodness, his holiness and mercy. It is a scheme which at once secures the honour of the divine government, and the recovery and happiness of fallen creatures. Heaven rang with acclamations of joy, when the plan of it was first published. When an angel was sent down to give intelligence of the birth of Christ, we are told how the morning stars sang together again, and how the sons of God shouted for joy: for "there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men," Luke ii. 13. The glories of creation do, as it were, fade and grow dim, when those of redemption appear. The sun lost, as it were, its lustre, when the Sun of righteousness arose upon the earth. Or, we may adopt the words of the poet concerning liberty, and apply them with greater justice to the gospel;

"It makes the gloomy face of nature gay,
Gives beauty to the sun, and pleasure to the day."

With what transports of joy did the angels welcome the Saviour into the world again, when he arose from the dead; and accompany their ascending Lord, when the work of redemption was finished; when he led captivity captive; when he "went up with a shout, even the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." The facts and doctrines, the institutions and design of the gospel, are the subjects of their diligent study. "These things," saith the apostle Peter, "the angels desire to look into," 1 Pet. i. 12. There is joy in heaven among the angels of God, when sinners repent and are converted. They sing together and shout for joy, when dead souls are made alive; when the rational creation wears that beautiful aspect, which receiving and obeying the gospel produceth. This should enlarge our ideas of that glorious gospel; dispose us to the diligent study of it, and the most sincere and stedfast obedience to it; and should excite our most ardent praise to God and the Lamb. "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it;" and let all nature join in the song, "for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel." Let me add one inference more:

5. *What joy and shouting will there be among the angels at the last day.* Even that day, when the mystery of God shall be accomplished; and the redemption of all his people be completed; when all the righteous shall be gathered together, joined to an innumerable company of angels, and all God's sons be brought to glory. This earth indeed, which is the stupendous effect of divine power and wisdom, and hath been the scene of so many wonders of providence and grace, shall then be destroyed, and all its glories laid in ruins. But there are new

heavens and a new earth ; a nobler, and more glorious and stable world, in which dwelleth righteousness : and neither angels nor good men will regret the loss of this world, when they are fixed together in one more magnificent, splendid, and delightful, better suited to their spiritual and holy natures, and which will never pass away or decay. With what transports of joy will the angels welcome the whole family of the redeemed to the mansions in their Father's house ! and when they are all gathered together, such an anthem of praise, such harmonious songs and shouts of joy, will be raised by saints and angels, as even heaven itself never heard before. May you and I be there, brethren ; join in the harmony, and partake of the joy ! Amen.

DISCOURSE II.

GOD'S CONDESCENSION IN BEHOLDING THE THINGS IN HEAVEN
AND IN EARTH.

PSALM CXIII. 5, 6.

Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high ; who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth ?

IT hath often and very justly been observed, that it is one great recommendation of the holy scriptures, that they express more justness of thought concerning the nature of God, than any other compositions whatever. They particularly resolve all events into his will and providence, which is the truest philosophy as well as the best divinity. They inform us, that God is our creator and preserver ; that the state and circumstances of every creature, and all events relating to them, are ordered and determined by him. Consequently, it becomes us to entertain just ideas of him, to make those ideas familiar to our minds, and to set the Lord always before us. We have in the text one of the most grand, and at the same time amiable, representations of the blessed God, which is to be found in scripture. And I would entreat, my brethren, that you would pay a most serious attention to it, and manifest, even while I am discoursing upon it, how much your minds are affected with it.—I shall,

I. Consider the view here given of the unequalled majesty and glory of God. And,

II. Of his great and amazing condescension in his regards to his creatures. And then make some natural and useful reflections upon the subject.

I. *I am to consider the view here given of the unequalled majesty and glory of God.*

Now here are two thoughts suggested to us—that he dwelleth on high—and that there is none like him.

1. He dwelleth on high. The margin renders it, “He exalteth himself to dwell,” or maketh himself high and sublime in his dwelling. We naturally annex the ideas of grandeur, magnificence, and excellency to what is high above us. Hence princes are called “high,” and addressed by the title of “highness.” When they appear on their thrones, they are raised above others, to denote their dignity, state, and precedence. Hence God is spoken of as “the high God,” “the most High,” “the Highest,” and the like. He is described as “seated on a throne high and lifted up,” Isa. vi. 1. As the heavens are high above us, he is said to have prepared his throne in the heavens; to have fixed his seat on high, quite above this earth and all created glory. So in the verse before the text, “the Lord is high above all nations and his glory above the heavens;” above these visible heavens; beyond the sun, moon, and stars, and higher than the thrones of angels, principalities, and powers. The residence of his glory is in the heavenly world. There he appears by some peculiar displays of his presence, clothed with honour and majesty; “thousands of thousands stand before him; ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto him.” From thence he beholds the whole universe, reigneth over it; and all creatures, and all worlds, are under his government and control. In short, we have the noblest description of this, in words admirably sublime and plain, yet not fully to be comprehended even by an angelic mind, “He dwelleth in the high and holy place, and is the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,” Isa. lvii. 15. The other thought suggested in the text is,

2. There is none like him. “Who is like to the Lord our God?” which may either be an expression of the Psalmist’s great admiration, or a challenge to the whole world to name any being equally great, glorious, wise, and good. There is none like him among the human race: none of the wise men, the nobles, and princes of the earth. They are called “gods,” but they are but “children of the most High.” They are derived, dependent, dying creatures; owe all their power and authority to him, who is “King of kings and Lord of lords, the blessed and only potentate.” There is none like him among the gods of the earth. Not their idols; for they are not equal to men. None of those beings or objects of worship which have a real existence; for they are all produced, and can at any time be destroyed, by him. “Who then is so great a God as our God, the true God, the living God, the everlasting King?”—Among the saints in heaven, there is none like him. Glorious things are spoken of them; but all their lustre is derived from him and they shine by his rays. The angels, though the top of the

- creation, and though they bear the nearest resemblance to the Father of lights, are not equal to him. They are all formed and supported by him, and derive all their knowledge, power, zeal, and happiness from him. "Who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord? who among the children of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?" Ps. lxxxix. 6. Such is the nature of the divine Being, that it is impossible any other being should be equal to him. It is impossible, in the nature of things, that there should be any more than one eternal, self-existent being. We are likewise taught by scripture, as well as reason, to argue from his works, that there is none like him. No other being can produce such stupendous effects. So Moses addresseth him: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Exod. xv. 11. So David saith, "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord, neither are there any works like unto thy works," Ps. lxxxvi. 8. The operations of his providence, and especially his appearances for his church and people, prove his unequalled glory. "Thou hast done great things, O God; who is like unto thee?" Ps. lxxi. 19. Nay, the Lord himself appeals to his works, as a proof of his supreme, unequalled deity. "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by their names, by the greatness of his might," Isa. xl. 25, 26. So that, upon the whole, we may adopt the words of Moses, and say, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun (or Israel), who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky," Deut. xxxiii. 26. But we are chiefly to direct our thoughts to his kindness and goodness, in which, as well as his greatness, there is none like him. Let us therefore proceed to consider,

II. *The view given us of his great and amazing condescension.*

After we have been surveying his unequalled majesty and glory, nothing can be more delightful than to view him as stooping to regard his creatures, and manifesting the greatest kindness to them. "He beholdeth the things that are in heaven and in the earth." Here let us observe, what the Psalmist intimates, that it is great condescension in God to behold the things that are in heaven—but greater and more wonderful condescension to behold the things that are in earth.

1. It is great condescension in God to behold the things that are in heaven. By "the things that are in heaven," is to be understood the inhabitants thereof; the saints and angels. And beholding them signifies, not only taking notice of them, but kindly regarding their services, and manifesting himself and his

favour to them. He taketh notice of them,—is not so wrapt up in his own essential perfections, glory, and happiness, as to overlook them. They dwell in his immediate presence, and he doth them the honour to employ them in his service; sends forth his angels to minister to the heirs of salvation, though he could guide, defend, and prosper them by his own immediate power. He likewise graciously regards their services. He beholds them with an eye of approbation, complacency, and delight: he is pleased to see them happy. His presence and love fill them with joy, and constitute their chief felicity. Now it is great condescension in God thus to behold them: for they are creatures, and fall infinitely short of him in perfection. They cannot by searching find out God, nor have they minds capacious enough to receive him. Besides, their best services, though not sinful and polluted, are yet imperfect. They are not equal to his glory; for “he is exalted above all blessing and praise.” Were their services more excellent, they could not profit him. He is not worshipped, even by these glorious spirits, as if he needed any thing or they could make any addition to his happiness. His infinite perfection, sufficiency, and bliss raise him above them. “Behold he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly,” Job iv. 18; or he maketh no boast of them. It is therefore a great stoop of condescension and goodness in God to behold the things that are in heaven.

2. It is greater and more wonderful condescension to behold the things on earth. “His eyes run to and fro through the earth, and he beholds all nations.” He takes notice of all they say and do. Nor is he an unconcerned spectator; for he ruleth over all. His providence continually works for the support and comfort of his creatures. His constant energy holdeth human souls in life; nor can the wisest or greatest of men speak a word or move a finger without him. He “leaveth not himself without witness” of his being and providence in any nation, in that “he doeth good, giveth rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness.” Yea, his care stoops so low, that “not a sparrow falls to the ground without him, but the hairs of our head are numbered.” He manages the affairs of his creatures and performeth all things for them. And his care extends to the meanest as well as the greatest of men. He beholds those things which men commonly overlook and despise; and doeth kind and wonderful things for the poor and the helpless. This the Psalmist had immediately in his eye, as a proof of the divine condescension. Therefore he adds, after the text, “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;” from the lowest and most contemptible circumstances; “that he may set him with princes, even the princes of the people.” He interposeth to “make the barren

woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children." But he views his saints and servants with peculiar complacency and delight. "His countenance beholdeth the upright, and he withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous." He regards their poor services; and though they fall so short of the services of angels, and are not only imperfect but polluted and mingled with sin, yet he taketh notice of them and is pleased with them. He doth not despise the cry of the destitute, but heareth it; and esteems himself glorified, when his people offer praise to him, Ps. l. 23. He loveth the gates of Zion, where they meet to worship him; and their prayers and praises come up as grateful incense, perfumed with the merits and intercession of Jesus, their high-priest. Yea further, this high and lofty Being "dwelleth with him that is of a contrite spirit." He taketh pleasure in his people, delights over them to do them good, and rejoiceth in the prosperity of his servants. Some of the heathen philosophers thought it beneath the dignity of God to stoop to such mean affairs: but the great God doth not think it beneath his own dignity to behold the things on earth. This will appear to be great and wonderful condescension and grace, if we consider what mean creatures men are. They derive their being from the dust; dwell in houses of clay; at their best estate they are altogether vanity; will soon be laid in the grave and turned to corruption. And will the great God set his eyes upon such creatures as these, when there are infinite orders of beings above them, much nobler than they; and when all the nations of the earth are in his sight but as the drop of the bucket, and lighter than vanity?—In order to enhance this condescension, let it be considered, that men are sinners against God; depraved and defiled creatures. They have lost their innocence and are become unclean; have lost their order and are become irregular. They often desire, judge, and act wrong; and there is not one that perfectly doeth good, no, not one. By the generality of men God is affronted, neglected, or forgotten. Even the worship and obedience of his saints, of the best of his saints, are imperfect and polluted. Who then is like to the Lord our God, that stoops to regard such creatures, and be so good to a world so full of vanity, sin, and pollution?—Let us consider, once more, what his condescension and grace have done. He hath sent his own Son to be a propitiation for sin, and is in Christ, reconciling this guilty world to himself. He pardoneth the numerous sins of those who repent. And "who is a God like to thee, that pardoneth iniquity and retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy?" Micah vii. 18. He maketh those of the sinful children of men who are penitent and humble, his children and the heirs of glory. He taketh poor sinners out of the dust of death and sets them among the princes of heaven. He stoops so low, to raise us to the highest dignity and happiness.

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God!” Let us, with the Psalmist, “consider the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, the moon and the stars which he hath ordained,” Ps. viii. 3. Let us think of those moving worlds, filled with intelligent beings; otherwise, as the prophet argues, had they not been formed to be inhabited, he would have created them in vain, Isa. xlv. 18. The inhabitants of some of them are perhaps of a superior order to man. Reflect how many nobler beings he hath under his government and care, whom it is, nevertheless, a stoop of condescension in him to regard: then we shall be disposed to say, with high admiration and humble gratitude, “Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou shouldst thus graciously visit him?”

Thus have I endeavoured to show the great and amazing condescension of God in beholding the things that are in heaven, and especially the things that are in the earth. Let us now draw some useful instruction from the subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *Learn to reverence this great and glorious Being, since he dwelleth on high and there is none like him.* This is the inference which the prophet Jeremiah draws from the truths we have been considering; “Forasmuch as here is none like unto thee, O God; thou art great and thy name is great in might; who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the great men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee,” Jer. x. 6, 7. What horrible wickedness then is there in blasphemy, profaneness, swearing, and taking the name of God in vain! How impious and abominable is it to treat this great and glorious Being with insolence, contempt, or neglect! Let us, my brethren, cherish in our hearts grand and sublime ideas of him; think of him with humble awe and admiration, and speak of him with the greatest respect and reverence. Indeed his name should be seldom mentioned; never but on great and solemn occasions. Mr. Boyle, who was a great philosopher and an eminently pious man, never mentioned the name of God in his discourse without a solemn pause for recollection and adoration. Let us especially be careful, whenever we draw near to him in acts of worship, to impress our minds with a deep sense of his unrivalled greatness, majesty, and glory. His condescension and grace should not lessen him in our eyes and abate our regard, but increase it. False greatness keeps men at a distance, that it may excite a false reverence. But as God is infinitely great, the nearer we approach to him, the more we shall be struck with pious reverence, if we have any seriousness and gratitude in our hearts. An awe of God ought to fill our minds, when we approach to

him in secret. For we are not addressing a fellow-creature, a prince, or even an angel; but the infinite, eternal, peerless JEHOVAH, who dwelleth on high, and beholdeth the hearts of men. It becometh us to show all the external marks of reverence and holy awe, when we join in social worship, especially when we appear in the solemn assembly. This ought peculiarly to be the care of those who lead the devotion of others, especially in the church of God. Yet, sorry I am to say, that some of these seem to know very little of the nature of the great God, but to "think him altogether such a one as themselves," Ps. l. 21. They speak of him and even to him, with a saucy familiarity, as if he were a common acquaintance; yea, with less respect than any well-bred man would address an equal. They call him to come and go, to do this or grant that, not only with a familiar but an insolent air. Nothing can be more indecent, scandalous, and shocking than this: yet it is too often found; especially in those who pride themselves in their knowledge of the gospel and zeal for its peculiar doctrines, and are most ready to censure their brethren who differ from them: though this irreverence shows, that their own heads or hearts are very erroneous. On this subject, the formality and irreverence with which many say grace at their meals, deserve a reproof. It is better to sit down like beasts to their fodder, and not seem to acknowledge God at all, than to be guilty of such profaneness. Surely these persons utterly forget to whom they are speaking, and insult their benefactor with the appearance, yea scarce the appearance, of gratitude and devotion. Allow me to add, in this connexion, that there seems to me a great impropriety and indecency, when praying for princes and others of distinguished rank and authority, to mention those titles, which are usual, and very proper in common discourse; as "majesty, highness, honourable," and the like. It is sufficient to mention them by their stations and offices, as kings, princes, judges, senators, when we are addressing the high God, the infinite and eternal majesty of heaven; before whom all the nobles, princes, and nations of the earth are "less than nothing and vanity." Let those who attend public worship be very reverent and serious in their deportment. To sit or stand in a lolling posture, to be looking about at every one that comes in, or to appear with countenances unaffected, in time of prayer, is a great and scandalous indecency, too common, even among some who ought to know better and set a better example. To prevent these indecencies, I must recommend kneeling in time of prayer, where persons' infirmities do not prevent it. It is a natural expression of reverence, and as such is used to earthly princes. It is the proper posture of suppliants; and hath been the practice of the saints of God, under the old testament, of the apostles, and our blessed Lord himself. These reflections and admonitions

naturally arise out of our text ; as you may see from what the Psalmist saith : “ Who in heaven can be compared unto the Lord ? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto unto God ? God is therefore *greatly to be feared* in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in *reverence* of all them that are about him,” Ps. lxxxix. 6, 7. Again, he saith, “ The Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. Oh come, let us worship and *bow down* ; let us *kneel* before the Lord our Maker,” Ps. xcv. 6. Let me therefore, on the whole, exhort you, brethren, if you desire to “ serve God acceptably, to do it with *reverence and godly fear*.”—Is none like unto God ?

2. *Learn the odious nature of pride.* How detestable a vice is it in any creature, especially in such mean and sinful creatures as men. Shall a worm, that is a little advanced above his fellow-worms, is possessed of some superior knowledge, fortune, station, or honour, put on lofty airs ; be fond of place and precedence, and in effect say, Who is like unto *me* ? when he hath nothing but what he hath received, and may the next moment, by one frown of the most High, be destroyed ? But never doth pride appear so odious and horrid, as when it usurps the prerogative of God, presumes to judge the hearts of men, and determine their fate ; or when persons expect that every one should stoop to them and pay them homage. This is in effect setting up for gods : and you may see in scripture, how God hath resented and punished this insolence. The king of Babylon said, “ I will ascend into heaven ; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God : I will be like the most High ;” yet what was the answer of God to him ? “ Thou shalt be brought down to hell,” Isa. xiv. 13. The king of Tyre’s heart was lifted up, and he said, “ I am a god, and sit in the seat of God.” But what saith God to him ? “ Thou shalt be a man, and no god, in the hand of him that slayeth thee,” Ezek. xxviii. 9. The pope likewise, as St. Paul foretold, “ exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, showing himself that he is God.” But the most High shall “ destroy him with the brightness of his coming,” 2 Thess. ii. 4, 8. Thus will he abase all that deal in pride, and bring down their high looks. They that would be like God, being lifted up with pride, shall fall into the condemnation of the devil. “ Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect to the lowly ; but the proud he knoweth afar off,” Ps. cxxxviii. 6. He frowns upon them and will bring shame and destruction upon them. Let us not “ think of ourselves, then, more highly than we ought to think, but be clothed with humility ;” for in the sight of God we are “ less than nothing and vanity.”

3. *The condescension of God affords much comfort to his people.* Rejoice, my brethren, in the favourable notice God taketh of you. The highest and greatest of beings vouchsafes

to regard you. Though you are poor and mean, and men overlook you; though your brethren hate you and your friends go far from you; yet God looketh down from his majestic throne upon you. Amidst the infinite variety of his works, you are not overlooked. Amidst the nobler services of ten thousand times ten thousand saints and angels, not *one* of your fervent prayers or humble groans escapes his ear. What a satisfaction should it be to you, in every place and circumstance of life, to reflect, that the high and lofty One beholds you and takes care of you! What a noble consolation doth it afford, to be able to say with the Psalmist, or rather with our blessed Lord himself, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me," Ps. xl. 17. "This honour have all the saints." And well may we say with Moses, "Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord?"

4. *How strongly should the condescension of God attract our hearts to him, and make our gratitude and love to him warm and constant.* Affability and condescension in men beget affection and esteem. And shall not the infinite condescension of God inflame our love to him? He draws us to himself with "the cords of love," and they must be stupid and obdurate, who can resist the mighty attraction. Doth he stoop so low as to visit man; to magnify the son of man; to visit him every morning and do him good every moment? And shall we feel no emotions of gratitude to him, who is the best as well as the greatest of beings; in whom we live and move, and who hath done so much to promote our everlasting happiness? Doth he so graciously regard such little, insignificant, sinful creatures, as we are, and make each of us as much his care, as if there were no other creature for him to regard? Awaken then, O my thoughtless heart, and cherish the greatest love for him. Let me never abuse his condescending goodness by a wanton neglect; but love him so much the more, the more he discovers the excess of his love.

5. *Let us learn to imitate the condescension of God.* Let me exhort those of you, who are distinguished by your fortune and rank in life, or by your authority over others, as parents, or masters, that you be courteous, kind, obliging: that you honour all men, treat your lowest inferiors with civility and kindness; and thus, as St. Paul exhorteth, "condescend to men of low estate," Rom. xii. 16. Pity and visit the poor, as God doth; and do what you can to raise them out of the dust. Enter tenderly into the concerns of your inferiors, and show kindness to all men. To be friendly and affable to all, and stoop with a grace, is to be polite, to be a gentleman; yea, what is better, it is to be a Christian; to be so far like God. Condescension is not meanness. The very word implies dignity. As you owe more to God than others, for his bounty to you, show your gratitude

this way. By kindness and condescension you will be esteemed and beloved ; for “ before honour is humility ; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Would you be truly great ? the way is to “ become the servant of all :” 1 Cor. ix. 19. For the greatest and best of all beings is the most condescending ; and “ blessed be his holy name from this time forth and for ever more !” Amen.

DISCOURSE III.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN CHOOSING OUR INHERITANCE.

PSALM XLVII. 4.

He shall choose our inheritance for us.

A SENSE of the divine care and favour have been in all ages the support of the church and the consolation of good men. No thought can enter into the mind of man, better adapted to promote its piety and peace than this—that the world is under the government of God, and all the events of our lives under the direction of his providence. It is therefore with great propriety that this thought is frequently inculcated upon us in scripture ; and it is necessary that ministers should often remind their hearers of it, if they desire to be helpers of their holiness and their joy. You have been often reminded of it, brethren ; and I am this day to call your attention again to it. The Psalmist had been, in the name of the church, celebrating God’s appearances for them, and directing them to take shelter in his continued guardianship. He encourages them to hope, that God would “ subdue the people under them” (v. 3) ; the Philistines and the remainder of the Canaanites, who had not yet been conquered. And he adds, in the text, “ He shall choose our inheritance for us.” God had already chosen Canaan for their inheritance ; even the excellent land, which he gave to Jacob, whom he loved. But whereas the whole of it was not yet conquered, and the state of what they possessed was much unsettled, he animates their faith in God, that he would choose and determine who should be settled in the remainder of the land, and would order, in wisdom and goodness, the various circumstances and events of their lives. So that the words are applicable to every good man, and may naturally be considered as the language of his heart.—I shall therefore endeavour,

I. To illustrate the temper expressed in the text.

II. Urge it by some motives—and then conclude with a proper improvement of the subject. I am,

I. To illustrate the temper expressed in the text ; or consider what the words import.

Now they naturally express a belief of the providence of God—of its peculiar concern for good men—and a hearty consent to all its determinations.

1. The text expresseth a belief of the providence of God. That he takes notice of and rules over the concerns of all his creatures; not only the affairs of kingdoms and nations, but of particular persons. The world is not governed entirely by mechanical laws, but by the constant interposition and energy of the great Creator. A belief of this truth is supported by the strongest arguments; by what we daily see of the instincts and appetites of living creatures; the gravitation of matter, or the tendency of all heavy bodies to the earth: by many wonderful events, that happen contrary to what might be expected from the appearances of things; the discovery of secret wickedness; the infatuation of wise counsels; and many turns and changes in the affairs of nations and particular persons. The scripture frequently asserts this, and thereby lays a solid foundation for our faith. There we are informed, that God doth not rule over nations only, or a part of the earth, but that “his kingdom ruleth over *all* :” that “*all* the ways of the children of men are before the eyes of the Lord :” that his providence extends to particular persons; the circumstances and occurrences of their lives; yea to those things which are most casual: that “not a sparrow falleth to the ground without him;” that “the hairs of our heads are numbered;” that “the lot is cast into the lap, but the disposal is of the Lord.” A belief of this our text expresseth, and it is perfectly just and reasonable. It intimates further,

2. That providence hath a peculiar concern for good men, and is exercised towards them with special care, tenderness, and love. This is agreeable to our Lord’s argument: when he had asserted that providence extendeth itself even to birds and flowers, he inquires, “Are not ye much better than they?” Will not providence particularly interest itself in the concerns of rational creatures; and more especially of good men? Though God causeth his sun to arise, and his rain to descend, on the evil as well as the good, and answers his own purposes by many favours shown to his enemies; yet he is peculiarly “good to Israel, to them that are of a clean heart.” Because he is the righteous Lord, he must love righteousness, and take particular care of those who practise it. So it is said, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through all the earth;” but it is “to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect with him,” 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Hence we meet with such declarations as these: “His eyes are upon the righteous; he withdraweth not his eyes from them: he keepeth the feet of his saints.” “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord;” and “All his paths are mercy and truth to them that fear him.” These declarations are confirmed by the histories of the bible, and by many appearances

of providence in behalf of good men in later ages ; directing them in their difficulties ; answering their prayers ; giving sudden turns to their minds, in cases where they were running into sin or calamity. He chooses their inheritance upon proper considerations, and with a regard to their best interest. It is a select inheritance, which he chooseth for them ; such as may appear on the whole most conducive to their happiness ; and consequently most expressive of his love and care. And indeed the government of the whole world is administered and exercised with a peculiar regard to the righteous.

3. The text expresseth a hearty consent to God's determinations. Not only a belief that he will choose for his people, but an entire, cheerful *acquiescence* in his choice : as if the Psalmist had said, Let him do it : I take pleasure in the thought, and heartily acquiesce in the choice at all adventures. On this belief of the providence of God is founded a concurrence of the soul with its determinations, and an humble, cheerful resignation to the divine will. I would submit the choice of my inheritance and the events of my life to God. I would not choose for myself without him. I would diligently attend to proper means and weigh every prudential consideration ; but the final determination is in God's hand ; and I am pleased that it is so. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. Here I am, let the Lord do with me as seemeth good in *his* sight. This temper then includes the important virtues of humility, patience, and contentment. It includes a frame of spirit, suited to a persuasion of an over-ruling providence. This persuasion is expressed and strengthened by daily, fervent prayer ; and there is to be nothing in the actions or words contrary to it or inconsistent with it : no impatience, fretfulness, or discontent allowed ; no unlawful methods used to mend our circumstances, or extricate us out of any difficulty. And if the rebel heart is disposed to murmur, it must be checked and restrained by resolution, watchfulness, and prayer. This may suffice to illustrate the temper expressed in the text. It includes a firm belief of the providence of God ; that good men are the objects of his peculiar attention and care, and a hearty consent to all its determinations. I go on,

II. *To recommend to you, and urge you to cultivate, this temper :*

This humbly cheerful submission to the determination of providence, and a cordial willingness that God should choose our inheritance, or the several circumstances of our lives. And here consider, we are not able to choose for ourselves ; God is most fit to choose for us ; he hath chosen well for us already, and therefore we should trust him ; and till we do so, our minds can never be easy.

1. We are not able to choose for ourselves. The pride of our hearts may sometimes make us question the truth of this asser-

tion ; but mournful experience will sooner or later incontestably prove it. Nay, that very pride will soon produce such an experience. For it leads men to hurry on blindly and hastily, without using prudence and deliberation in laying their schemes, and without considering and advising with others, how to execute them. Our ignorance renders us unfit to choose. We see but a little way before us ; and cannot discern the end from the beginning. This appears from hence, that in many cases we are obliged to consult and take advice of others. And why doth Solomon observe, that “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety,” but because one may see, especially in complicated affairs, what another doth not,—may have superior sagacity, or knowledge of the world and experience? So that if a man hath no counsellor but himself, he can scarcely be safe in pursuing important schemes. Solomon also observeth, that “a man knoweth not what is good for himself in this vain life.” Every one, who hath made careful observations on his own affairs, or on human life, will say with the prophet, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself ; that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” Jer. x. 23. Another thing which renders us unfit to choose for ourselves is, that we are apt to judge by sight and sense ; to fix upon that which is agreeable at present, without considering its remote consequences. Men are apt to be partial in their own cases, and, through the prevalency of self-love, to choose that which would be injurious to others or inconsistent with the general good. Our knowledge is limited to a few objects, and we see those imperfectly. We cannot look into futurity, and have many false biasses upon our judgment. We have often found ourselves mistaken, and been forced to acknowledge, that we have made a bad choice. Hence there is so much work for repentance. So that on the whole, there is a great deal of truth in the observation of a pious writer, that “if God would study a close, quick, and certain way of being revenged upon a man, he needs but open his stores, and bid him choose for himself.”

2. God is most fit to choose for us. For his understanding is infinite, his wisdom perfect, his judgment unerring. No ease can possibly arise which will puzzle him ; nor can he have any bias upon his mind to act wrong. Of him it is said, that “he doth declare the end from the beginning, and knoweth from ancient times the things that are not yet done,” Isa. xlv. 10. He hath all his schemes before him, and sees every affair, of every creature, in every possible connexion and combination. He knows how to come to the end in the best way ; most easy to us and most advantageous to our true interest. He sees the connexion of our affairs with those of others ; and he alone is equal to the mighty province of adjusting the various interfering interests of mankind. He knows our frame, temper, and inclinations ; and

how they may be altered by our advancing further in life, or by various occurrences, which we cannot foresee. He perhaps knows, that what we choose now, we shall dislike then; and what he chooseth for us, though now disagreeable, will then be approved by us. He knows what is best for us upon the whole; taking in every circumstance of life, and extending his views to our eternal state. And as he is a righteous and good being, as well as infinitely wise, he cannot wish us ill, delight in our misery, or put us to any needless pain and uneasiness. Besides, he hath graciously promised to choose and determine for those, who, by faith and prayer, humbly commit themselves to him. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." I add,

3. God hath chosen well for us already, and therefore we should trust him. This appears from the many favours he hath bestowed upon us, and the goodness and mercy that have followed us all our days. He hath chosen well for us *all*; an inheritance in a land of plenty and liberty; where the light of the gospel shines around us, and where we have the free use of bibles and Christian ordinances. In this respect we have all reason to acknowledge, "the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage," Ps. xvi. 6. There are none of us but have many social and relative comforts: and it is an instance of his wisdom and goodness, that, in most cases, the minds of men are soon and easily reconciled to the inconveniency of their situation, houses, and callings; yea, oftentimes they come to take pleasure in that, which at first they thought an evil. There are few who have walked with God, and given themselves to prayer, but have experienced some remarkable appearances of providence for them. God hath answered their prayers in some nice and critical conjunctures, and they have observed the loving-kindness of the Lord. If we are Christians indeed, he hath chosen for us an inheritance infinitely glorious and delightful. He hath not only given us an inheritance among the disciples and servants of Christ, but an inheritance in his love, as our covenant God and Father in and through his Son. "The Lord himself is the portion of our inheritance, and his grace maintaineth our lot." Yea, it is "his good pleasure to give us the kingdom;" even "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." And shall we not trust him, and leave him to choose and determine all the circumstances and events of our lives? Once more,

4. Our minds can never be easy, till we leave it to God to choose for us. God will have his choice, whether we leave it to him or no. For thus he hath declared by the prophet Isaiah, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure," Isa. xlvi. 10. If men will not humbly submit to him, he may, ac-

according to another expression of that prophet, "choose their delusions;" suffering them, in the greatness of their pride and folly, to go astray and run headlong into ruin for both worlds. It is therefore the wisest, safest way to acquiesce: else we shall only perplex ourselves; and the more bent we are upon having our own way, the more trouble and disappointment we shall meet with. If children will not suffer their parents to carve for them, but will do it for themselves, they will soon cut their own fingers. If we humbly leave the matter to God, attend to our duty, and follow the leadings of his providence, a delightful serenity will diffuse itself over the mind: a blessed evenness of temper will take place. A steady reliance upon providence will give firmness to our resolution, and strength to our hope. It will pluck out the sting of affliction and take away the horror of death. "If ye will not believe," saith the prophet, "surely ye shall not be established." He whose "heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord," shall "not be afraid of evil tidings." Accordingly Solomon exhorts, "Commit thy work unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established," Prov. xvi. 3. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." A cheerful resignation to God to choose for us, entitles us to the comfort and benefit of these and many more exceeding great and precious promises. Our ignorance of what is best for ourselves, the infinite wisdom and goodness, and the gracious promises of God, the kind choice he hath already made for us, and the great satisfaction arising from trusting to his choice and acquiescing in it, should lead us to cherish the temper expressed in our text. Let me now add some reflections from the subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us own God's choice in every agreeable circumstance of life.* When we take a serious view of the benefits with which we are daily loaded, and those circumstances which tend to make our lives comfortable, we must each acknowledge, on the whole, that God hath chosen well for us: in many instances, better than our expectation; and in all, better than our deserts. When we find comfort in our settlements, our houses, our relations, our worldly circumstances, let us ascribe it to the good providence of God and adore the Father of mercies for it. Let us not say, "My wisdom contrived this; my sagacity sought it out; my power effected it." This is nonsense, as well as impiety. Remember who gave you your wisdom, sagacity, and power: "Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou hast not received?" Let us bless him, who gave us counsel and direction, and lift up our thankful hearts to "God most high, who performeth all things for us."

2. *Let us humbly acquiesce in whatever is disagreeable.* Many

of God's determinations may, and will, appear disagreeable to such weak and ignorant creatures as we are; creatures so fond of our own schemes, and so conceited of our own abilities. Those things which are directly calculated to produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness, may be for the present not joyous, but grievous. Here then is the grand point of religion; to submit our wills to the will of God; and to believe every thing he orders to be for the best, and acquiesce in it as such, though we cannot at present see it to be so. Christians, have you not solemnly and frequently referred the matter to him? Have you not often said, is it not the language of every prayer—"Father in heaven, thy will be done?" And will you be displeased with that will? Have you left it to God to choose, and will you be angry with his choice? "Will any teach God knowledge?" It is only if need be, that he chooseth what is disagreeable to you at present, and what you would have been glad to have been excused from. It is to prepare you for the heavenly inheritance, which he hath graciously chosen for you. The strict discipline of a school is painful to your children; but you, who are wiser than they, know that it is necessary to fit them for usefulness in life, and the proper management of the substance or estate you intend for them; and therefore you do not remove them from this discipline. And doth not your heavenly Father know what is best for you, as well as you know, in many cases, what is best for your children? Would you have him deal worse by you, than you do by them? Hath he not promised, that "all things shall work together for your good?" It shall be so in fact, but we do not know how: and, indeed, that is none of our business. That is God's part. Ours is humble, dutiful submission. Do you not see that he appoints all his other children to afflictions; and appointed Jesus, his best beloved Son, to a large share of them? So that "God dealeth with you as his children." Labour, then, and learn, "in whatever state you are, therewith to be content;" yea, "in every thing to give thanks, since this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

3. *Let us never allow ourselves to be anxious about future events.* Some doubts will often arise in our minds, and tormenting fears sometimes prevail. But they should be resolutely checked with this thought, "My times are in God's hands, and he careth for me." Do you fear any painful event? Think with yourselves—Is this an affair in which God will not choose for me? Or is it an affair in which he will choose otherwise than well? Can infinite wisdom be mistaken? Can perfect goodness intend me evil? Have I left my eternal interests with God, and can I not trust him with those of time? Blush, O my soul, at such a shameful inconsistency. Remember, my brethren, that anxiety is vain and fruitless; that there cannot

be greater folly than to anticipate afflictions, and bring the evil of the morrow upon the day, when that of the day is sufficient for all our strength and patience. Remember, likewise, that it is impossible for us in many cases to pronounce, whether any circumstance or event will be good or bad in its ultimate tendency. If it be of God's choosing, we may be sure it will be good. Let us not then admit a thought of anxiety; but "wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he will strengthen our hearts." In order to support a patient, composed, cheerful spirit, let us live near to God by the daily exercises of fervent prayer; and especially pray, that he would "fulfil in us the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power;" and help and cure the remainder of unbelief, which is the foundation of all our sorrows, fears, and anxiety.

Let me conclude the discourse with mentioning a few instances, in which we should leave it to God to choose our inheritance for us, and showing how our faith should work with regard to each.

God shall fix the bounds of my habitation, and choose where my lot shall be cast: in what country, town, or neighbourhood; whether near my friends and the house of God, or at a distance from them: whether my habitation shall be pleasant and commodious, or otherwise. Lord, it matters little, if I have but thy presence; for thy presence will make any house as the house of God, and any place as the gate of heaven.

God shall choose the state of my worldly substance: whether it shall be greater or less: whether I shall keep or lose what I have; get more, or labour in vain. I know that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth; that greatness, splendour, and wealth, are not happiness. If he chooseth riches for me, I hope he will give me grace to escape the snares of them; that I may not perish, as thousands do, by that sweet poison. If I am in straits and necessities, may I be rich in faith, and an heir of the kingdom; and then, having nothing, I shall possess all things!

God shall choose what relative comforts I shall enjoy or lose: whether my children and friends shall live or die: whether I shall enjoy their company and converse, or whether lover and friend shall be put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness or distress. Mine is a partial fondness; but he knows what is best for them and for me. He knows whether my affection may not change, or theirs: whether they shall hereafter prove comforts or crosses to me. I leave it, therefore, to him to choose. Let the God of the spirits of all flesh determine.

God shall choose what degrees of health and capacity for service I shall enjoy. "He is my life and the length of my days." If he takes away my health, that best earthly heritage,

and weakens my strength in the way, his will be done! If he appoints me wearisome nights, his presence can penetrate the darkness, and his comforts delight my soul. If he knows I shall grow proud of my health, and spend my strength in sin and vanity, let him take them away! and rather let me wear out with pining sickness, and go mourning to the grave, than have my good things in this life, and be tormented for ever in the next.

God shall choose whether my abode on earth shall be longer or shorter. I know he will keep me in this distant world no longer than he hath work for me to do; and I would patiently wait my Father's time. When he calls me to the grave, I would answer and say, "Here I am, Lord: now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Let Christ but be magnified in my body by life or death. Let me but be serving him somewhere, it matters comparatively little where; in this world or another. His service makes a heaven upon earth; and heaven is but serving him more perfectly than I can do here.

Finally, God shall choose my inheritance in the other world: in what particular station and employment I shall be fixed. He hath spoken good concerning his servants in general; and I am not anxious about the particulars. Christ is gone to provide me a mansion in his Father's house; and I leave it to him, who hath the key of it, to determine in what part of the house my abode shall be. I know it will be near himself; that it will be a rich, glorious, everlasting inheritance; and the meanest is quite too good for such a worm and such a sinner as I am; in each of these respects, Lord, I am all submission to thy will. I hope what hath now been said hath strengthened this resolution in me, (and may the Lord confirm it through the whole of my future life) that I will be anxious about nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known my requests to him. And then the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep my heart and mind through Christ Jesus, Phil. iv. 6, 7. Amen.

DISCOURSE IV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING A DUE SENSE OF OUR
UNWORTHINESS OF GOD'S MERCIES.

GEN. xxxii. 10.

*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth,
which thou hast showed unto thy servant.*

It is with great pleasure that the mind traces the remains of antiquity; especially those recorded in the histories of Moses, which are many hundred years older than any other now extant.

The simplicity of the patriarchal life is an agreeable object of contemplation ; and the devout temper, which holy men manifested in those days on various occasions, deserves to be considered ; and it is our duty to cultivate and show the same. The sentiment and disposition, which Jacob expresseth in the text, is highly proper for us to maintain at all times ; especially when we are approaching to God in the exercises of devotion. Jacob was now returning to his father's house, from his long residence with his uncle Laban. God had blessed him with a numerous family and a large stock of cattle ; and favoured him with some peculiar manifestations of his presence. But he was now in a very distressing situation. He had sent a civil message to his brother Esau, to give him an account of his return and his circumstances. He was informed by the messenger, that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Upon this, we are told (verse 7), "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed : " afraid, lest his brother should destroy him, his wives and children, or plunder him of his substance. Under this distress he applies himself to God by earnest prayer ; acknowledges former instances of his goodness and care ; pleads the gracious promises he had given him ; and mixeth with his acknowledgments and pleas, those very affecting expressions of his own unworthiness which we find in the text. "I am not worthy," or (as the word is rendered in the margin) "I am less than all the mercies," or "less than the least of all the mercies ;" utterly unworthy of the smallest favour thou hast bestowed upon me, "and of all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant." In treating this subject I shall,

I. Show how reasonable it is, that we should maintain a deep and humble sense of our unworthiness of divine mercies. And,

II. Point out to you some of the advantages, which will arise from such a temper.—I am,

I. *To show the reasonableness of maintaining an humble sense of our own unworthiness of divine mercies.* And this I think will best appear by considering, on the one hand, how many and great our mercies have been—and, on the other, how often we have abused and forfeited them. Let us,

1. Consider how many and great our mercies have been. Jacob, you see, laid a stress on this thought, when he speaks of "*all the mercies and all the truth*," which God had shown to him. You see, likewise, that he traced up all his comforts and enjoyments to God, as the author ; considered them as the effect of his mercy and goodness, and the fulfilling of his promise ; in which respect he called them his truth, or the effects of his truth and faithfulness. And no doubt Jacob upon this occasion recollected, as fully and particularly as he

could, all the benefits he had received from the God of his fathers. And thus must we do, in order to be thoroughly sensible of our unworthiness. For the greater and more numerous our mercies appear to have been, the more humble sense we are likely to maintain of ourselves. It would be too copious a subject to enter upon the detail of the mercies, even the most important mercies, which we have received from our bountiful Creator. It will, I hope, be sufficient in this connexion to remind you of those general mercies we have received; each of which comprehends innumerable branches. Think then, my brethren, of the mercies which are common to us as men; of our shape and form; the pleasure we derive from our senses, and the capacity which our several limbs and organs give us for service and enjoyment. Let us think of the powers of the mind; of judging, choosing, reflecting upon our actions; the capacities of discernment, memory, and recollection. Let us think of the bountiful manner in which our wants have been supplied; of our food and raiment, our habitation, and every thing that is easy and comfortable in our situations, callings, and circumstances. Let us think of our relative mercies; the comforts we derive from our connexions and friendships, our commerce and conversation with one another. Let us think, as another head of mercies, of our privileges as Britons; our climate and situation; that our lot is cast in a happy land and amidst the greatest advantages which that land ever enjoyed; of the security of our lives, liberties, and properties, under good laws and a righteous administration: the domestic peace and plenty we enjoy, and the comfortable prospect we have of the continuance of these blessings to us and our posterity. Let us especially think upon that mercy of mercies, Jesus Christ, and the blessings of the glorious gospel with which we are favoured; both what we enjoy, and what we hope for, in consequence of it. God hath sent his dearly beloved Son to instruct, redeem, and save us; to instruct us in the most important truths; to redeem us from the worst enemies, and conduct us to everlasting salvation. Let us think, what a mercy it is to have the holy scriptures in our hands; to enjoy the benefit of ministerial labours and Christian ordinances, and the influences of the Spirit to make them effectual for our good. What a mercy is it to know that we have the guardianship of angels, can come boldly to the throne of grace, and that nothing can exclude us from the divine favour and everlasting life, but wilful impenitence and unbelief! But oh, what tongue can express the great goodness, the inestimable mercies, which God hath prepared for his servants in the future world; what he hath promised and engaged to do for them, both for their bodies and souls, hereafter and through eternity? We have had much experience of the divine truth in hearing our prayers and fulfil-

ling its engagements: and have all desirable assurance, that whatever God hath promised he will perform. Now these mercies of God to us have been constant; new every morning. They contain a rich and infinite variety, and "when we would count them, they are more than we can number."

2. Consider on whom they have been bestowed. On mean and sinful creatures, who have often abused and forfeited them. They are bestowed on mean creatures. Man is indeed a noble creature and of a high rank, when compared with the brutes. But compare him with the angels of God, those great and holy beings, and how mean doth he appear! Compare him with a God of boundless wisdom and holiness, and he shrinks into nothing. And yet such a creature as this, God daily loadeth with his benefits. And he doth this, not because he is afraid of us, lest we should lessen his happiness; not because he is indebted to us for any kindness or service we have done him, but because we are his creatures, and our Creator delighteth in mercy. So that considering ourselves merely as creatures, we are unworthy of such mercies as he hath bestowed upon us. But this will especially appear, if we consider ourselves as sinful creatures. When Jacob made the acknowledgment in the text, he no doubt recollected some instances of his guilt, especially towards his brother Esau; in defrauding him of his birthright and his father's prophetic blessing. And nothing will make this acknowledgment appear more reasonable, or better dispose us to make it, than a recollection of our many sins. Were we innocent creatures, God hath done more for us than we deserve. Even angels must own that this is their case; but every one who knows any thing of religion and the law of God, must acknowledge that "in many things we offend all." Goodness of nature engages to acts of beneficence: but to continue or restore misapplied, perverted favours, this is properly mercy. Let us consider, how often we have forgotten God our Maker, and restrained prayer before him, or presented it without any serious remembrance of him. How many thousands of his mercies have we overlooked! How many thousands have we abused! What pride and confidence in the time of our prosperity! What impatience and fretfulness in the season of adversity! How often have we ascribed our enjoyments to our own wisdom and might, and never acknowledged God as the giver of them, or only done it in a formal manner! In how many thousand instances are we chargeable with slighting, disregarding, or misimproving spiritual blessings! Conscience, if it be attended to, will accuse us of many transgressions of the law of God and neglects of our duty, though we could not call it grievous: of entertaining light thoughts of sin, and making free with temptations to it: of undervaluing Jesus Christ and the blessings of his grace; trifling with the ordinances of his

institution, and doing the work of the Lord negligently. It will accuse us of resisting and quenching the motions of the Spirit of God, and being deficient in justice and charity to our fellow-creatures, and in the resolute government of our appetites, passions, and desires. Our iniquities, in short, are more than we can number, and they are aggravated by our numberless obligations. And now, must not such sinful creatures have forfeited their mercies? And would God be unrighteous if he were to take them away? How unworthy then are we of them! In consequence of these our inexcusable transgressions, and this our shameful ingratitude, we have deserved divine judgments, and must acknowledge, "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed," and sent to the land of darkness, horror, and despair, where mercy never comes, hope never dawns. So that we are so far from having any merit to plead before God that there is much demerit in us. So far are we from being worthy of the least of his mercies, that we are worthy to be punished with everlasting destruction. And our lives being prolonged and our comforts continued are entirely owing to the amazing patience, indulgence, and mercy of God. So reasonable then doth it appear, that we should maintain and express, with Jacob in the text, a deep and humble sense of our own unworthiness of the least of God's mercies. I now proceed,

II. *To show the advantages arising from such a temper, and what considerations and motives should excite us to cultivate it.*

Now here I would observe, that it is a temper very pleasing to God. It will dispose us properly to receive and improve his mercies. It will lead us to submit to the gospel method of salvation. It will promote our patience under the afflictions of life, and excite our kindness and compassion to others.

1. It is a temper very pleasing to God, as it is highly becoming needy, dependent, guilty creatures. It ought to be the ambition and concern of every man to please God; for, "in his favour is life." Angels are happy, because he approves them and delights in them. What is the best disposition for creatures and sinners, and "what doth the Lord require of us, but that we walk humbly with God?" It is agreeable to a human benefactor to see his favours received with humility and thankfulness: and we have many places in scripture where the Fountain of all good expresseth a complacency in those who are humbly sensible of their own unworthiness. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly; but the proud he knoweth afar off," Ps. cxxxviii. 6, and "every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to him." Thus the prophet declares, that "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, dwelleth with him who is of an humble and contrite spirit," "The sacrifices of God are a broken heart; a broken and contrite spirit he will not

despise." He delighteth in the prayers that proceed from an humble heart, and no other. See a remarkable instance of this in the story of the pharisee and publican. The former appeared before God, full of his own merits; and boasted to God, how much better he was than others; how regular and punctual in his observance of the rites of the law. While the publican, deeply conscious of his own unworthiness, with down-cast eyes, said, "God be merciful to me a sinner:" but he went down to his house justified and accepted of God. You will likewise recollect in this connexion, what high encomiums our blessed Lord passed upon the centurion, who said, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." Further, God will show how pleasing and acceptable such a disposition is, by conferring more mercies on those who maintain it. For thus he hath declared, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; and he giveth more grace to the humble." We cannot expect that God should pity our indigent, sinful condition, unless we ourselves are duly affected with it: and when we become so, we are prepared for the best and greatest mercies. When we see and acknowledge our own emptiness, and thus manifest and increase our humility, we are best prepared to be "filled with all the fulness of God."

2. It will dispose us properly to receive and improve his mercies. For it will promote a warm sense of gratitude and obligation, the best principle of duty and obedience. It will lead us to observe the mercies of God, as they are bestowed; and to consider the importance and value of each of them. We shall receive them with thankfulness, as undeserved blessings; be grateful for common mercies, yea for the smallest favour, because we discern ourselves unworthy of it. If we are so elated with pride as to think they are our due and that we have deserved them at God's hand, we cannot be grateful for them. But this humility will heighten our gratitude and lead us to give glory to God, by acknowledging his goodness and reminding ourselves of our great and innumerable obligations to him. The language of our hearts will be, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" This will lead us to inquire, why God bestoweth such mercies upon us, what is the design of the divine goodness; and what returns he expects from us. And a little reflection will convince us, that "the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance;" that all the blessings of his providence and grace are so many talents with which we are entrusted, and of which he expects a suitable improvement. Why are such favours shown to the unworthy, but to display and magnify the riches of divine grace, and lead those, who are the objects of it, to walk worthy of the Lord, and to be diligent in the work of a master, who dealeth so kindly and bountifully by his unworthy servants? Thus after St. Paul had expressed his unworthiness of divine

mercy, as a blasphemer of Christ and a persecutor of his church, he acknowledgeth, "By the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all," 1 Cor. xv. 10. To recommend this humble sense of our own unworthiness, let me further observe,

3. It will lead us to comply with the gospel method of salvation. It hath been well observed that "revelation supposes a corruption of the heart, as medical prescriptions suppose a disorder of the body;" agreeable to Christ's observation that "they who are whole need not a physician but they that are sick;" who see and feel themselves to be so, and are sensible of their danger. They and they only are desirous of the remedy. Men scoff at religion and devotion, and walk after their own lusts, because they are proud and high-minded. They cannot digest the humbling scheme of the gospel, which considers and addresseth men as unworthy, sinful creatures, and proposeth to them salvation by grace. The temper I am recommending is the best preparative to receive the gospel: for it is to be received as the free gift of God; as an act of divine grace. A deep sense of our own unworthiness will remove the principal difficulties that lie in the way of "looking to Jesus," relying upon his righteousness and merits for salvation, and not upon our own. If men think themselves worthy of these favours, there needs no other proof, that they have no part in the matter. But when the heart is truly humbled under a consciousness of guilt and unworthiness, then and then only will Christ be welcome. Thus the pharisees, who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others," "rejected the counsel of God against themselves." And it is the same wretched disposition, which makes men now unwilling to come to Christ that they may have life. When pride is mortified and we see our own unworthiness, we shall have full conviction of the wisdom and grace of God in requiring us to approach him through a mediator, and to depend upon the worthiness and intercession of Jesus for the acceptance of our prayers. We shall not think to barter with God for his benefits and deal with him on the foot of merit; but disclaiming all thoughts of that kind, shall "rejoice in Christ Jesus;" trust in him, acknowledge ourselves *unprofitable* servants, and "look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

4. It will promote our patience under the afflictions of life. An impatient, complaining temper hath generally its foundation in pride. It is a conceit of men's own worth and merits, that leads them sometimes to say, "Why should I be afflicted more than others? Why am I not as healthy and as rich as such and such persons? Why is not my family as flourishing and prosperous as theirs?" On the contrary, the humble Christian's language is, "My health, my substance, my children are blessings

which I never deserved; which I have often forfeited; and therefore God is just in taking them away. It is mercy enough for such a sinner as I am, to be in the land of the living and out of hell; and yet God continueth many mercies to an unworthy creature, which he might also have taken away." Thus Job argued, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord," unmerited, forfeited, good, "and shall we not receive evil also," Job ii. 10, deserved evil? In like manner it will promote our patience under injuries and affronts from men. Whatever merit we may have before men, we have none before God. If we did not deserve ill treatment from them, we have deserved that and ten thousand times worse from him. Humility would lead us to acknowledge, that we do not deserve honour and kindness from men; and therefore God is just in depriving us of them; however unjust the instruments of our hurt or reproach may be. This temper would teach the poorest contentment with their lot. "I am a sinner; and a sinner amidst ten thousand mercies: and shall I complain if I labour and fare hard, and want the conveniences of life? All on this side hell is too good for me." When David had taken away Mephibosheth's estate upon a charge of treason, he says, "All my father's house were but as dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thy table: what right have I therefore to cry any more to the king?" 2 Sam. xix. 28. Thus when we consider what we are, and what our father's house, and how many signal blessings God hath bestowed upon us, we shall say, "What right have I to complain?" Once more,

5. *It will excite our compassion and kindness to others.* A due conviction of our own unworthiness will promote an obliging disposition and carriage. A high look, haughty airs, and an imperious treatment of others, proceed from pride; an opinion of extraordinary merit and superiority. But being sensible that all our mercies proceed from God, and that we are unworthy of them, would prevent our being puffed up with those things by which we are distinguished from others. Remembering that God maketh us to differ; that we have nothing but what we have received, abused, and forfeited, will prevent our glorying, and treating others with contempt. Were we sensible that God daily loadeth us with benefits, though most unworthy, we should not so often make that objection against acts of charity, that the petitioners are underserving; but should endeavour to be like God, who is good to the unjust and unthankful; and to "be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful." Being sensible that all our blessings come from God, we shall not grudge to bestow an equitable proportion upon the poor, who may be in every respect as worthy as ourselves.

These, my brethren, are the great advantages of maintaining a deep and humble sense of our unworthiness of the least of

God's mercies. It is a temper very pleasing to God—will dispose us properly to receive and improve his mercies—lead us to submit to the gospel method of salvation—promote our patience under the afflictions of life—and excite our compassion and kindness to others.

And now, what remains, but that I exhort and beseech you to cultivate this temper more and more? In order to that, frequently take a close and serious survey of the mercies you have received and the sins you have committed; that you may not “think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but may think soberly.” Labour to feel yourselves undeserving of the favours of heaven, and to be sensible of the very imperfect returns you make for them. Be careful not to take a pride in your best actions. Remember that both the power and the motive to perform them proceed from God, and that nothing in them is properly your own, but their imperfections. Be careful especially to maintain and express this disposition in all your approaches to God. Pride will sink the value of all our religious performances and render them an affront to God. When, like Jacob, you come to seek favour and mercy from God, always imitate his temper; and mix with your petitions and pleas, the most lowly expressions of your own unworthiness. Nothing tends so much to humble the heart, as serious prayer; and particularly a confession of our unworthiness, meanness, guilt, and pollution in the presence of God.* It was to make our prayers subservient to this purpose, among other weighty reasons, that we are commanded to approach to God through a mediator. Let us earnestly plead his merit and worthiness; and seek the influences of the Holy Spirit, to convince us of sin and lead us to walk humbly with God and show all meekness to all men. I am so fully convinced of the importance of this temper, that I can scarcely with any thing better for myself and you, than that we may be daily proficient in it; that the expressions in the text may be familiar to our minds and be inscribed in our hearts; that we may say with the devout Mr. Herbert,

Let wits contest,
And with their words and mottoes windows fill;
“Less than the least
Of all thy mercies,” is my motto still.

* An ingenious writer (Langhorne) hath observed, that “some recommend it to mention in prayer the several sins we have been guilty of. But this is to suppose God to be such a one as ourselves; or conceive more meanly of him. When a person is disposed to ask forgiveness, a generous mind will not be delighted with the recapitulation. And is man more generous than God?” But a particular confession of past sins, even of those which we have good reason to hope are forgiven, may be very useful; in order to promote and maintain humility, caution, and watchfulness; to keep conscience tender, and increase our activity in religion for the future. In this view it is recommended in scripture, “That thou mayest remember and be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame,” either to complain of divine providence or censure others, “when I am *pacified* towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God,” Ezek. xvi. 61—63.

DISCOURSE V.

USEFUL REFLECTIONS ON CHRIST'S WORKING AS A CARPENTER.

MARK VII. 3, [FIRST PART.]

Is not this the carpenter?

THE prophet Isaiah foretold concerning the Messiah, that he should be "for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to the house of Israel; for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem," Isa. viii. 14; 1 Peter ii. 8. This prophecy was remarkably accomplished in the unkind reception which our Lord met with among the Jews, and the offence they took at many circumstances of his life. "He came to his own and his own received him not." But there was no place where he met with a worse reception than in his own country, at Nazareth; which led him to remark, in the verse following the text, that, "a prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." In the beginning of his public ministry St. Luke tells us "he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up," Luke iv. 16, &c.; and preaching there, his countrymen first admired, and then endeavoured to destroy him. But he, who was never weary of well doing, nor discouraged by some fruitless attempts, "went thither to Nazareth again" (as St. Mark tells us in the first verse of this chapter), for that is meant by his own country: and there "he taught in the synagogue." Many who heard him were astonished; yet began to reflect upon him, and be offended at him; despising and rejecting every thing he said, on account of the circumstances of his birth and education, and the manner in which he had hitherto been employed. Among other scornful questions, they asked, "Is not this the carpenter?" My design in the following discourse is,

I. To illustrate this observable circumstance of our Lord's life. And,

II. Suggest some useful remarks from it.

I. *I am to illustrate this observable circumstance of our Lord's life.*

His supposed father Joseph, though he was "of the royal house and lineage of David," was a person of low circumstances, and of the occupation of a carpenter: and our Lord, his supposed son, was brought up to the same business. It was a maxim among the Jews, that every man should bring up his son to some mechanic trade. And it was the determination of their celebrated rabbies, that "he who did not teach his son some trade, taught him to steal." Those young men among them, who enjoyed a learned education, were all taught manual trades;

that they might well employ the vacancies of life, and be able to gain a livelihood by the trade, if not by the learned profession. Thus St. Paul was a *tent-maker*, though educated at the feet of Gamaliel and a student in his academy. The same custom is observed among the easterns to this day; and the Grand Seignior or emperor of Turkey, is always taught some mechanic business. Our blessed Lord was brought up to his father's calling, and worked at it; probably till the time he appeared in a public character, that is till he was thirty years of age. There was a tradition among the ancient Christians, mentioned by Justin Martyr, one of the fathers, that he made ploughs and yokes. His countrymen, who knew his manner of life from his youth, call him in the text "the carpenter." St. Luke tells us, that when Christ was twelve years old, he went with his parents to Jerusalem; there discoursed with the doctors in the temple; and after that he went his parents to Nazareth "and was subject to them," Luke ii. 51; which may include his labouring with his hands at his father's occupation, as a faithful servant; as well as behaving in all other instances in a modest, humble, and obedient manner.—Our Lord condescended to this employment to provide for himself and the family to which he was related; and the rather, as probably Joseph died some time before our Lord entered on his ministry, for we read nothing of him after that time. He did not choose to work miracles for the support of the family; because his time was not yet come: and the design of his miracles was to gain attention and regard to his doctrine, and dispose the minds of his hearers to receive it and believe in him. He might also intend by this, to set an example of diligence and activity to others; and also to habituate himself to fatigues and hardships: as a life of indolence and ease would have not only been inconsistent with one design of his coming, namely to set us an example; but would have rendered him less fit to endure hardships and sufferings: for he knew that he should be exposed to many of these in the course of his ministry. Then he travelled about from place to place; often without any convenient and agreeable accommodations either for food or repose; for when "the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of man had not where to lay his head." Thus the former, and by far the greater part of our Redeemer's life was employed: and his countrymen, who knew this, were offended at it, when he came to appear under a public character and to be a preacher of righteousness. I proceed,

II. *To suggest some useful remarks from this observable circumstance of our Lord's life.*

And here, by considering the text in its connexion with the history to which it belongs, we may observe that—A person's original, his business and circumstances in life, are apt to occa-

sion prejudices against his most useful and instructive observations. But such prejudices are very absurd, unreasonable, and mischievous. The condescension of the Son of God in submitting to such humiliation deserveth our admiration and our praise. It is no dishonour to a person to follow an honest and lawful trade. The conduct of Christ furnisheth all, and especially young persons, with an example of diligence and activity. And once more, we may observe, that men may faithfully serve God and follow their lawful callings at the same time. Let me a little enlarge upon each of these.

1. A person's original, his business and circumstances in life, often occasion prejudices against him: against his most wise, useful, and instructive observations. Thus the Jews were prejudiced against Christ. As they paid a greater regard to the traditions of their elders than to the word of God, they expected that the Messiah should be a great prince and conqueror, and appear with all the marks and ensigns of royalty and dignity. But when they saw Jesus appearing in this humble form, they rejected him, and (as it is said in the verse where our text is) "were offended at him." They were astonished that one who had worked among them as a common mechanic,—who had never attained the title of Rabbi, or master of arts, nor even had sat at the feet of any of their doctors, should set up to be a public teacher. This they frequently objected. At his first preaching at Nazareth, they "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth," Luke iv. 22. But, recollecting his circumstances, they soon concluded there could, upon the whole, be nothing admirable or remarkable in them: for they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" A sufficient reason, they thought, for rejecting every thing he said. At another time "they marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" John vii. 15. They could not but acknowledge that he spoke wisely and performed mighty works; but the old objection returns, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?" Do not we know his mother and brethren? "Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him," Matt. xiii. 58. Such prejudices harden the hearts of the Jews. And many of them continued and perished in their unbelief. The case is frequently the same in the present day. A prophet or public teacher hath less honour in his own country than in other places. The circumstances of the family from which he sprung, and some disadvantages in his education, indispose his neighbours to pay the same regard to him, which strangers would do. Persons in low circumstances and stations in life are little regarded. Though their advice is ever so good and weighty, it is seldom heard; and perhaps they are checked and affronted for presuming to give their judgment; especially in the presence of

the rich and the great; particularly if it differ from theirs. This was an evil always under the sun; and Solomon took notice of it in his day: "There was a little city, and few men in it: and a great king besieged it and built great bulwarks against it: and there was found in it a poor wise man, and he, by his wise and prudent advice, delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength; nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard," Eccl. ix. 14. So a later Jewish writer observes, "When a rich man speaketh, every man holdeth his tongue; and look, what he saith, they extol it to the clouds: but if the poor man speak, they say, What fellow is this?" Ecclus. xiii. 23. There are very few who have made observations upon life, but have seen many instances of this prejudice. And as it flows from pride and is attended with many evil consequences, it ought to be guarded against. I therefore observe,

2. Such prejudices are very absurd, unreasonable, and mischievous. They were remarkably so in the case before us. The Jews allowed that our Lord showed eminent wisdom, and performed mighty works (see the verse before the text), yet they rejected him, because he had been a carpenter; was a person, as they thought, of low birth and education. Now if they had less pride and more sense, they would have argued just the contrary way; and have concluded that there was something very extraordinary in him. That a person of his rank and education should be elevated so far above others, and perform such mighty works, surely, his wisdom and power must be given him from above. It is plain that no man (as Nicodemus rationally argued) "could do such mighty works, except God were with him." Because he had been brought up to a trade, and not to learning, they ought to have argued, that he was an extraordinary person and divinely assisted; who all of a sudden, without the help of education, gave such evidence of great wisdom, and did such mighty works. It could not be imputed to his breeding, for that was mean: therefore there must be something extraordinary and divine in it.* "Though it may seem strange, that the great reformer of the human race should devote most of his days to a servile occupation, it furnishes us with one of the strongest evidences of the divine original of Christianity. When Jesus, destitute of all the means of improvement, bursts out of obscurity with a lustre that surpassed all the orators and philosophers of antiquity, we cannot suspend our belief of his divinity a moment."† Thus any wise man would have reasoned, who was free from prejudice; but the reasoning of his townsmen was most strange and absurd. And though such prejudices are not equally, yet they are evidently absurd in common instances. For wisdom is not so much derived from

* Tillotson.

† Library, No. IX.

books and languages, as from thought and reflection : from observing the state and circumstances of the world, and the workings of the human mind, and making diligent remarks upon life ; which may be done without great advantages of education. Many in the lower class of life, having carefully and long made such observations, become remarkable for their good sense, sagacity, and great prudence in the common affairs of life, which render them the ornaments and blessings of society. The glare of wealth and honour blinds the eye of the soul. Pride stops up the sources of knowledge ; and, (as Solómon observes,) “a scorner seeketh wisdom, but findeth it not.” To be prejudiced therefore against the judgment and conduct of the inferior rank of men, is certainly unreasonable. Let us learn hence not to “judge by appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” Let the advice of the meanest be carefully weighed : remembering that the common people often see right ; and that partiality to the rich, and those who are called honourable and learned, is as expressly forbidden in the word of God, as it is contrary to reason. Let us carefully guard against such prejudices ; for they often bias the mind against the plainest truths, and the most salutary and prudent advices ; they often influence the judgment and choice a wrong way, even in matters of the greatest concern and importance ; as they did in the case of these conceited and prejudiced Jews. “Blessed is he, who is not offended in Christ,” on account of these circumstances in his life. And wise is he, who judgeth fairly and equitably of those about him, and giveth the honour of wisdom, piety, and usefulness to those to whom it is due, whatever their external circumstances be.

3. The condescension of the Son of God in submitting to such humiliation, demands our admiration and our praise. The Jews, we are told (in the verse before the text) were “astonished,” when they observed a person of so low an education displaying such wisdom. There is much greater reason for our astonishment when we consider, that he, who appeared in this humble form, was indeed “the Son of God, the brightness of his Father’s glory,” and begotten before all worlds. That he, who was made lower than the angels, and took on him the form of a servant, and laboured with his hands, as a common mechanic, was the same Being “by whom God made the worlds.” “By him all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible ; whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created by him and for him ; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist,” Col. i. 16, 17. How wonderful is it to think, that he, who while on earth handled the axe and the saw, “laid the foundations of the earth and that the heavens are the work of his hands !” That he, whom the hosts of heaven reverence, and who appeared of old under the form of God, should visit this

mean world, and work so many years for his own subsistence ! How great was his condescension and love, that he should come, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister ;" and submit to such abasement as would be reckoned a dishonour to the princes and great men of the earth, though they are all the work of his hand ; and "in every thing he hath the pre-eminence !" Thus was he "in all things made like to his brethren." The love which led him to stoop so low, claims our wonder and our praise. Worthy is he to receive the united acclamations of all the inhabitants of heaven, who emptied himself of his glory, and, "being found in fashion as a man, made himself of no reputation ;" and all to promote the happiness of mankind. Let the inhabitants of earth join with those of heaven, to admire his condescension, and adore and celebrate his love.

4. The conduct of our Lord reflects an honour upon trade, and upon those who are employed in useful arts. The contempt which some of those who are called "gentlemen," and boast of their wealth and blood, delight to throw upon tradesmen and mechanics, is weak and senseless. For how can their grandeur be supported without the cultivation of their land ? And how can their land be cultivated without the instruments which mechanics make ? How could the products of the earth be disposed of, and money obtained, without the consumption made by the multitude who live upon their daily labour ? It was an observation among the heathen, that "no manual labour was a disgrace." It is a much greater dishonour to live idle, and upon the labours of others : to squander away their substance, and leave the debts which they owe to tradesmen and mechanics unpaid. Hence it was an observation of Bishop Sanderson, that "idle gentlemen and idle beggars were the plague and scandal of the nation." But the conduct of Christ shows that there is nothing mean and contemptible in being a mechanic. When the Son of God and Prince of heaven became a common carpenter, what arrogance and folly is it to despise tradesmen, or mechanics of the lowest class ! Surely such a circumstance as this is sufficient to abate men's pride, and lead them to more just and honourable thoughts of their fellow creatures and fellow Christians. It should teach those who are employed in what are called genteeler trades, not to look down with contempt on those who are occupied in meaner ones. A little consideration would make them sensible, that such is the connexion and dependence of one trade upon another, and the circulation of money consequent upon various arts and businesses being followed among us, that to despise others shows neither good sense nor good manners ; nor indeed a just regard to self interest. This kind of pride is peculiarly unbecoming a Christian, who, as great as he may be, is the disciple of one who was once a carpenter, and must depend on his favour for every blessing for

time and eternity. Let this teach those whose callings are mean, and who may perhaps be despised by others on that account, to be content with their lot. "The servant is not above his master." They are but conformed to Christ when following mechanic trades. And if they are serious and good, they are truly honourable and happy. For, as the Psalmist observes, "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, and walketh in his ways ; for thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands. . . Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee," Ps. cxxviii. 1, 2.

5. This circumstance in Christ's life furnisheth all, especially young persons, with an example of diligence and activity. It is the will of God that every one should have a calling or occupation in life ; and it is better to be the meanest workman or day-labourer, than live in idleness. It is the duty of those, whom providence calls out to do it, to "work with their hands the thing that is good," Eph. iv. 28, and to be diligent in their proper business. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he was in a private character, was far from being slothful : and hath herein "left us an example, that we should follow his steps." His example is peculiarly proper for the imitation of young persons, of servants and apprentices ; who ought carefully to mind their proper business, and labour after skill and proficiency in their respective trades. Let them especially guard against a habit of indolence, or trifling over their work ; and employ themselves diligently in something that may turn to account. It should be their desire and care that they may not be unnecessarily burdensome to their parents, but rather support and assist them : being in this respect "subject to their parents," as our Lord and master was to his. Let not young persons think any honest employment too mean or too laborious, when they reflect on the occupation of the Son of God. And let parents be solicitous to inure their children to labour and hardship. Children delicately brought up, are generally ruined for both worlds. And if habits of diligence and self-denial are not early contracted, they are seldom or never obtained. Thus so many persons become the burdens of society, and are ready to do any wicked or mean thing to support themselves, because they have never been used to labour and endure hardness. "I have often," saith good Dr. Watts,* "pitied the descendants of honourable families of both sexes ; the unhappiness of whose education has given them nothing to do, nor taught them to employ their hands or their minds. Therefore they spend their hours in sauntering ; not knowing whither to go, or what to do. Hence they often give up themselves to mean and scandalous play ; spend their hours in chatting and merriment. They make the business of their dress the study and labour of half the day, and spend the rest in trifling discourse and laughter, and scattering jests and scan-

* Watts's Sermons, Vol. ii. p. 15.

dal upon their neighbours and acquaintance. All these pieces of folly and immorality would be rectified, if they would find but some daily and proper business to be employed in. Solomon, at his leisure hours, studied natural and moral philosophy; Paul wrought with his hands, to be an example to others: so did Christ. And that the younger women may not want an example how they should employ their leisure time, we read of good Dorcas, who, when she had no business of her own, 'made coats and garments for the poor,' Acts xix. 39. Such honourable examples deserve imitation.* Thus would all the mischievous consequences of idleness be prevented; especially those mentioned by the apostle: 'They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tatlers also, and busy bodies, speaking things they ought not,' 1 Tim. v. 13." Let the example of our Master teach us all, in our respective stations, "not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Which leads me to add, once more,

6. Persons may serve God, and follow their trades at the same time. So our Lord undoubtedly did. It was always "his meat," his business, and pleasure, "to do the will of him that sent him." He worked as a carpenter, while at the same time he "increased in wisdom and in favour both with God and man." No doubt he mingled devout meditations and affections with his daily labour: and while his hands were busy about his work, his heart was in heaven. Thus all his followers may act; and thus they ought to act. It is a very unhappy mistake to imagine, that all religion is to be confined to the closet or the house of God, and that the business of this world is to be neglected. It is a more dangerous error, on the other hand, for tradesmen, and mechanics, labourers, and servants, to imagine that religion is not their concern; or not so much as it is the concern of gentlemen and those who have nothing else to do, or need not labour with their hands to support themselves and their families. It is the duty of every man; of him who hath most business and the greatest number of avocations, to redeem some time every morning and evening for prayer in secret and in his family; and to devote the whole Lord's day to work the work of God and mind religion. If his business will not permit this, his business is sinful; at least so much of it is. Better be the meanest tradesman, labourer, or even beggar, than live without prayer, and without God in the world. He that doeth so, if he gain the whole world, will lose his soul. But it should be the concern of all to make even their trade and their labour an act of religion and serving God. And this it will be, when it is undertaken from good principles, and pursued to a good

* It is much to be wished that the children of wealthy parents were obliged to learn some *manual* trade, especially gardening. The importance and advantages of this are well shown by Mr. Locke, Education, §. 201, &c.

end : when the cares of this world do not overcharge the heart : when thoughts of God, religion, and another world are mingled with your daily business : when you are often lifting up your hearts to him amidst your employments, for his assistance and blessing, his presence and his love. Try the experiment, my friends, this week ; and endeavour while your hands are employed about the world, to have your hearts, as much as possible, fixed on him, who hath been represented to you as a common mechanic, yet nevertheless, “always did the things that pleased his Father.” Think of his diligence and activity, his condescension and his love. Let devout affections be rising to him, who gives you all your strength, discretion, and success. Then your business, like Christ’s, will be done “after a godly sort, and to the glory of God.” Then will your “merchandise and your hire be holiness unto the Lord.” Your spirits will be calm, contented, and devout : and you will learn and practise the happy art of making the business of both worlds go on prosperously and successfully together. In order hereto, let this be your daily prayer ; “Let the beauty,” that is, the presence and favour “of the Lord our God be upon us ; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us ; yea the work of our hands establish thou it,” Ps. xc. 17.

DISCOURSE VI.

THE UNBELIEF OF CHRIST’S BRETHREN.

JOHN VII. 5.

For neither did his brethren believe in him.

It was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, that the Messiah should be “despised and rejected of men.” And when we consider the many evidences he gave of his divine commission, and the gracious errand on which he came, it is very surprising that any of those, who were acquainted with his doctrine and miracles, should reject him ; especially that his brethren should do it. This circumstance, which the evangelist mentions in the text, is so extraordinary, that it deserves to be considered : and it affords so much instruction, that it demands your serious regard. We are told (v. 2) that the Jewish feast of tabernacles was at hand ; one of the feasts at which all the males were required to go to Jerusalem. Our Lord’s brethren therefore said unto him, “Depart hence from Galilee and go into Judea, that thy disciples there may see the works that thou doest : for there is no man that doeth any thing of this kind in secret, while he himself seeketh to be known openly.” “If thou doest these things,” that is, by a divine commission, “show thyself to the world ;” to the Jews, and especially to the great

men assembled at Jerusalem from this and the neighbouring countries. And the reason why they said this was, because "they did not believe in him." They did not believe that he was the Messiah; or at least such a Messiah as the prophets foretold. They had no right apprehension of the design of his teaching and miracles. They did not follow him as his disciples. Or if they professed any particular regard to him as a teacher, it was for worldly ends. By "brethren" we are here (as in many other places of the evangelists) to understand his cousins or near kinsmen. For it doth not appear that the Virgin Mary had any other child but Christ. It seems he had many cousins: some of the apostles were of that number. But there is a distinction made between his "brethren" and his "disciples" by St. John; "He went down to Capernaum, he and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples," John ii. 12; which intimates, that some of his brethren were not then his disciples and stated attendants. And these were the persons who gave him this advice, and concerning whom the text is spoken.—I shall,

I. Show how strange it was that they did not believe.

II. How it may be accounted for—and then consider what instructive lessons we may draw from this circumstance. I am,

1. *To show how strange it was, that Christ's brethren should not believe.*

And this will appear if we consider that they had heard his doctrine—seen his miracles—and known the circumstances and manner of his life.

1. They had heard his doctrine; both publicly and privately; and probably received many personal admonitions from him. They were not strangers, nor mere neighbours, who had heard him once or twice; but his near relations, who lived in the same town, and some of them at least in the same house. Before he appeared as a public preacher, and travelled about, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, they had undoubtedly heard many excellent discourses from him; adapted to enlighten their understandings, to awaken and edify their hearts, and so prepare them for the reception of those truths which he was at length to publish to the world. He, who took every opportunity to introduce religious discourse, would not neglect it at home, amongst his kinsmen. No doubt he gave them many private admonitions, suited to their cases; for he not only saw their behaviour, but knew their hearts, and addressed (as he often did in the case of the Scribes and Pharisees) to their secret reasonings, cavils, and objections; and reproved their lusts and passions which did not appear to others. When he entered upon his ministry, they had often heard him preach in his own city. They had gone in company with him to several

feasts at Jerusalem, as near relations used to go together. They had conversed with him by the way, and had heard him, with all plainness, tenderness, and seriousness, address his countrymen there. Many gracious words had proceeded out of his mouth in their hearing; coming with all the force and advantage which united dignity, wisdom, and love, could give them. Further,

2. They had seen his miracles; yea, many of them. Had they only seen one, namely, his first miracle at Cana, where they were present—his turning the water into wine, one would have thought, that one alone should have engaged their belief, as it did that of some of his disciples, John ii. 11, 12. They had seen many other of his miracles in their own town and neighbourhood; in their journeys to Jerusalem, and some which he performed there at the feasts. They had seen him restoring sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, and health and soundness to the sick, the paralytic, and the lunatic: miracles, the most beneficent in themselves, and performed with the greatest modesty: miracles of such a nature, that there was not the least room to suspect any artifice or collusion in them. Nay, in the advice they gave him in the preceding verses (v. 3, 4), they plainly acknowledge that he had performed "*many* miracles;" so that they had clear evidence of his divine mission.

3. They had also known the circumstances and manner of his life. They had, no doubt, often heard of the miraculous conception both of Christ and of John the Baptist, his forerunner, who was also their relation. They had heard from their aunt Mary, an account of the angel's appearing to Zacharias and to her; the vision of the shepherds; the wise men coming to Bethlehem; the destruction of the children there; the flight into Egypt; the testimony that Zacharias, Simeon, and Anna, had borne to Christ, as the Messiah; and the assurance John the Baptist had given, that Jesus was he. These circumstances would often be talked of in the family, and they could not be strangers to them. They had likewise seen our Lord's manner of life. Had he been one of those, who "say and do not," to have disregarded his doctrine would have been folly; yet it would have admitted some excuse. But they had known him from his childhood; seen daily proofs of his early piety, obedience to his parents, and diligence in his business. They had seen in how holy, just, and unblameable a manner he had behaved through his whole life; and thereby he had shown how practicable and how lovely his precepts were. One would have imagined, that his holy life should have added an irresistible weight to every thing he said, and have made them willing and obedient hearers. Let me just observe, that it was not at the beginning of his ministry that his brethren did not believe: or

else they might have been in suspense, waiting for further proofs of his divine mission. But it appears from the sacred story, that he had preached and wrought miracles at least three years, probably more, before this time; as well as had shone in a private station among them for thirty years before. These circumstances, that they had often heard his doctrine—seen his miracles—and been intimately acquainted with the circumstances of his birth and early years and manner of life, make it very surprising that his brethren should not believe in him. Let us consider,

II. How it may be accounted for, or whence it happened, that they continued in their unbelief, notwithstanding all these evidences.

And this is the more necessary to be considered, because the modern Jews, and some infidels of our own, have argued from the text, that our Lord really performed no miracles: that all he did of the miraculous kind was a cheat; or else his brethren would have believed. They can hardly think that his relations would have been more incredulous than others, and therefore they suspect that all was a fraud. If this was the case, and our evangelist was in the secret, he did not act with his usual cunning, in putting this circumstance into the history, that his brethren did not believe. In answer to this objection, it might be observed, that it is no uncommon thing for men not to believe, when they have the strongest evidence. Thus, to the objecting Jews one might reply, the Israelites did not believe in the Lord and in Moses, though they could not deny the many miracles wrought by him, nor even subsist without them. Thus to the deist one might reply, that many deny, or pretend to deny, the immortality of the soul and the being of a God, amidst such a variety of incontestable arguments proving both. But I think the difficulty may be easily solved by considering, that they had strong prejudices against Christ, and very bad dispositions of mind.

They had very strong prejudices against Christ. There were some, common to them as sinful men; arising from the purity of his doctrine, and that self denial, mortification, and contempt of the world, which he required. They had prejudices against him, likewise, as Jews. They expected their Messiah to appear on earth in great pomp and splendour, as a temporal prince; to rescue them from the yoke of the Romans, and make them lords of the world. This notion of the Messiah their teachers had inculcated; and these teachers they looked upon as infallible. They misunderstood the ancient prophecies; fixed their eyes only on that part of the Messiah's character, which suited their carnal desires and the present state of the nation. They did not contest his miracles; nay, they acknowledged them.

But they thought that, by continuing so much in Galilee, he did not consult his own credit and advancement as he ought to have done. Therefore they advise him to go to Judea; to appear at Jerusalem, the seat of dignity and power, and perform his miracles before the rich, the great, and the learned; whose decision in his favour would be an honour to him, and bring him in many followers. They intimate, that he set up for the leader of a party, and yet did not take the most prudent methods to strengthen his interest, and increase the number of his followers (v. 4). They thought his privacy inconsistent with the character of the Messiah, and wanted him to show himself to the world. He had not, in express words, professed himself the Messiah, nor raised a party to support the claim and the monarchy which they expected. Therefore, though they owned his miracles, and looked upon him as an extraordinary person, they would not believe him to be the Messiah. Having laid this down as a first principle, that the Messiah must be a glorious, triumphant prince, and seeing Christ taking no steps to appear as such, but rather manifesting an aversion to pomp and power, they would yield to no other proofs that he was the Lord's anointed. They did not understand the prophecies, that Christ was first to suffer and then rise to glory, and have an exalted kingdom, different from that which they had conceived; and therefore they did not believe. But their being the relations of Christ made their prejudices stronger than those of other Jews. For, expecting him to appear as a temporal prince, they imagined they had reason to hope for the first honours in his kingdom; as it hath been in all ages usual for princes, ministers of state, and other dignitaries, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to promote their relations and aggrandize their own families; and too often without considering their merit and qualifications. The story of the mother of James and John will throw a considerable light upon their temper. She came to our Lord, desiring that her two sons might "sit on his right and left hand in his kingdom;" that is, be his chief ministers of state, and have the first posts of profit and dignity under him. In like manner, his brethren had carved out all the great places of this kingdom which they expected among themselves: and when they saw our Lord taking no steps for his own advancement and theirs, and thus disappointing all their sanguine hopes, they concluded that he was not the Messiah. Again,

They had bad dispositions of mind, from whence their prejudices in a great measure arose, and not merely from their teachers. They were under the influence of an ambitious, worldly spirit; entirely governed by secular views: and whatever they might pretend, our Lord, who knew their hearts, saw that their principles and affections were covetous and sensual. So he tells them in the verse following the text, "Your time is always ready,

I cannot go to the feast now" without danger: you may go at any time: you are in no danger from the Jews: your temper and manners too much resemble those of my enemies, for you to fear any thing from them. "The world cannot hate you" (v. 7), for you are like them, will neither testify against their works nor decline practising them, whereas I do both, and therefore "it hateth me."

These remarks, I hope, sufficiently account for the unbelief of Christ's brethren. Undoubtedly our Lord could, by his mighty energy, have made them believers, disciples, and obedient: but that would have been inconsistent with the freedom of rational creatures, and the character of his people, who are a willing people. Their unbelief was the consequence of their own unjust prejudices and worldly views. And God in his infinite wisdom permitted it, as it turns out to the honour of Christianity. It shows that our Lord did not aim at a worldly interest. Had all his brethren believed in him, cried him up, and followed him, it might have been reckoned a plot amongst his relations to serve their own ends by joining in an imposture. This circumstance removes all suspicion of any family contrivance, or that the secular interest of any particular place or party of men was purposed by our Lord's undertaking. Besides, had they from the first believed, we had not enjoyed those useful instructions, which their unbelief suggests to us, and which I am now to consider, as the application to the subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us not wonder if some, who have enjoyed the greatest religious advantages, do not believe.* The blessed Jesus had, no doubt, a natural love of his relations as such, and left no method untried to convince them and make them his disciples, without putting a force upon their minds. And yet the advantages they had enjoyed, perhaps superior to any other of the Jews, were lost upon them. All the excellency of his doctrine, the purity of his character, and the lustre of his miracles, had no effect upon them. And will you wonder, Christian parents, after this, that some of your children perhaps, are not so serious and regular as you could wish? That after all your care and concern to form their minds and manners, you have the grief to see them thoughtless, disorderly, and irreligious? Shall we be surprised that there are melancholy instances of this kind in some most pious and regular families, which we have known: and where their parents have, as it were, "travailed in birth again that Christ might be formed in them?" Let us not be surprised if some of our servants are untractable, disobedient, and without the fear of God; though they have been instructed in the word of God and prayed with every day; though they have been obliged regularly to attend the house of God, and never suffered to waste

their sacred time : though they have had useful books put into their hands and been often admonished to serve God and mind religion. Let not good men be dejected, if their near relations prove bad and a dishonour to religion, though they have often exhorted and warned them, and tried every method to awaken, convert, and save them. It hath been the lot of some of the best men to be disappointed in their best and most favourite schemes ; those which they had formed, and indefatigably pursued, for the salvation of others. Shall I wonder that it hath been in many instances my own case ? that, after so many studious hours, earnest prayers, and as animated addresses as I could utter ; after some pains have been taken by private as well as public admonition, I should have reason to say, with regard to some, " I have laboured in vain," worn out my constitution and " spent my strength for nought and in vain." But peace, O my soul ! dare not complain ; for even Christ's brethren did not believe ; though never man spake, and lived, and wrought miracles as he did. He converted few ; he provoked and irritated many. Be thankful that some good is done. It was thy Master's joy, and let it be thine, that " surely thy judgment is with the Lord, and thy work, or reward, with thy God," Isa. xlix. 4. Let us not be discouraged, brethren, nor decline any attempts to do good, because *former* attempts have not been successful. Christ went on preaching and teaching, though he was despised and rejected by his countrymen and brethren. Good may be done hereafter. Some circumstances in life may, through divine grace, awaken those to thought and seriousness, who have been for many years sermon-proof. Let not ministers say, it signifies nothing to preach, or private Christians, that it is in vain to advise and exhort any more. Still let us do our duty, and wait upon God with more earnest supplication for success. And for your encouragement and my own, let me desire you to remember and consider, that Christ's brethren, most of them at least, did, after his ascension, believe in him. For we read that after that event, the apostles were assembled at Jerusalem, " and continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with *his brethren*," Acts i. 14. And in the next verse they are reckoned among his disciples. Those who do not believe now, may believe hereafter. Some worldly disappointments and afflictions may awaken them, as they did Christ's brethren, when they saw no hopes of grandeur and wealth from him. Perhaps this may not be the case, till after we are dead : and we may meet those in heaven, whose neglect of religion was our greatest grief upon earth, and gave us most concern in our dying moments.

2. *See what an enemy to religion a worldly spirit is.* Our Lord's brethren laid it down as a first principle, that the Messiah was to be a rich, powerful, and victorious prince, and that he

would make them all great men. They were so full of this expectation, that not all the strong evidences he gave of his being the Messiah, could convince them, while no steps were taken to gratify their ambitious views. A proud, covetous, worldly disposition hinders some from believing Christianity, and multitudes from obeying it. When men have laid it down as a maxim, that wealth and grandeur are necessary to happiness; when they are set upon being very rich; aggrandizing their families, making a figure in the world and out-shining all their neighbours, how can the love of God and goodness possibly reign in their hearts? They will indeed compliment Christ as their Lord and master, profess to believe in him and pay some regard to his institutions; but their hearts are not with him. They dislike many of his precepts, and disobey some of his plainest commands. They do not approve his doctrines of self-denial, of being mortified to the world and human applause, of doing as they would be done by, and dealing not only justly but honourably and kindly with all. He saith too much of charity and being rich in good works, for them to relish his maxims. They have no true faith in unseen things. They think it folly and needless preciseness to be strict in keeping the sabbath, attending public worship, and observing his commands; and to be scrupulous about ways and means, where their worldly interest is concerned. This temper alienated Christ's brethren from him: and every heart in which it prevails, is not, and cannot be, a heart in which Christ and religion dwell. The spirit of the world and the spirit of the gospel are quite opposite and contradictory. No man can serve two such different masters as God and mammon. Till the love of the world be subdued in the heart, there will be no relish for the doctrines and precepts of the gospel. While men are principally intent on laying up treasure on earth, they will not be solicitous to lay up treasure in heaven. Seek not therefore great things for yourselves. Let not ambition cheat your fancy, and disturb your repose; but watch against the world, as one of your worst enemies, and earnestly pray that God would mortify your hearts to it. For a worldly spirit blinds the eyes, stops the ears, sears the conscience, and leads men to reject Christ and make light of salvation, till all their hopes are disappointed and they sink into irrecoverable ruin. We learn,

3. *How much better is a relation to Christ by faith, than by nature.* It was indeed a great honour to these brethren of Christ to be related to him according to the flesh. But we see it was of no avail to their acceptance and salvation. And had they not afterwards believed, it would have ended in their greater shame and misery. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, "who loveth righteousness and whose countenance beholdeth the upright." He regards men only for their real worth, the

holiness of their temper and character. That we may be sensible of this, and not led to envy those who were his brethren in the flesh, he hath told us, that real piety and obedience will alone recommend persons to his esteem and friendship. As he was once addressing the people, a woman, charmed with his discourse, said, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts that gave thee suck. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they which hear the word of God and keep it." And we are told, that "his mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him; but he said, Who is my mother and who are my brethren? And he stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother," Matt. xii. 48. He will own such as his nearest kindred; love them more tenderly and affectionately than relations can love one another. He will acknowledge them, as the fruit of his labours, and the purchase of his blood. He will consult their best interest; do as much for them, as one relation can do for another, and infinitely more. His regard to them is founded on their being renewed and sanctified, and bearing his image; and he will employ all his power and authority to make them completely and eternally happy. To be related to the great and the noble, about which vain men make so much ado, is really nothing. To be related to the human nature of Christ himself is comparatively nothing. But to be united to him by faith; to be joined to the Lord, and so to become one spirit, is the greatest honour that any can possess. Death will soon dissolve all earthly relations; but this relation to Christ will never be dissolved. Nothing can separate true believers from his love. He will own them as his brethren in the great day. "He will say, Forasmuch as ye have shown kindness unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," Matt. xxv. 40. Let it be our ambition, my friends, to obtain such vital union with Christ, by believing in his name, receiving him as our Saviour, with a full consent of soul to his terms; and from a regard to his authority, and through the influence of his love, let us persevere in doing the will of his Father which is in heaven. To conclude; it is my earnest wish and prayer, that Christ may be formed in you; that he may dwell in your hearts by faith; and that the fruits of this faith, the effects of this union, may daily appear in your temper and lives. Then, whatever be your earthly connexions and relations, he will acknowledge you as *his* brethren, and conduct you to the presence and everlasting enjoyment of his Father and your Father, of his God and your God. Amen.

DISCOURSE VII.

OF CHRIST'S DOING ALL THINGS WELL.

MARK VII. 37.

And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well.

WHEN the queen of Sheba visited Solomon, and had seen his wisdom and the splendour and order of his court, she pays him this compliment: "It was a true report I heard of thine acts and of thy wisdom; but behold the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: for thou exceedest the fame that I heard," 2 Chron. ix. 5, 6. With infinitely greater reason may we, my fellow Christians, say this of Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. His wisdom and excellency far exceed the fame we have heard of him. After all that hath been heard and seen and read and thought of our exalted Redeemer, he still continues to be the delightful subject of our meditation and our praise. You are this day to hear more of him: and I have a cheerful persuasion that the topic will be agreeable to every true Christian. Let the dignity and importance of the subject call forth, in all, that reverence and attention which it so justly claims. Let us try our hearts, as we go along, what sense we have of his condescension and love; and observe how we stand affected to a life of unparalleled worth and goodness. When our Lord was in Galilee, "there was brought to him a man who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech," that is, as the word signifies, could not speak articulately. "Our Lord took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and spit and touched his tongue," to intimate to the patient what he was about to do, and then miraculously healed him. This was indeed one of the most wonderful miracles our Lord ever wrought. For the patient being dumb and deaf, he not only gave him the faculty of hearing and pronouncing words, but conveyed into his mind at once the whole language of the country; making him perfectly acquainted with all the words in it: their significations, forms, powers, and uses: so as to comprehend the whole distinctly in his memory, and speak it readily. It was a miracle upon the mind, as well as the body.* No wonder the standers by, when the man returned to them, and spoke plain, "were astonished beyond measure," and said of Christ, "He hath done all things well." My design is to apply this remark, as it is justly applicable, to our Lord's general conduct; and show with how much reason this was said of him; and then draw some useful inferences from the subject.

* Macknight in loc.

In order to show the truth of this remark, I would observe, that our Lord's actions were good in themselves—they were performed with good designs—they were done in an amiable and graceful manner—and this was the case with all his actions.

I. *Christ's actions were good in themselves.*

And this will appear in whatever light we consider him ; whether as a man, a preacher of righteousness, or a worker of miracles. If we view him in his general conduct, as *a man*, we shall find that he *did all things well*. I must not allow myself to run through all the particulars of his conduct : but content myself with observing in general, that he was perfectly free from all weaknesses, blemishes, and defects, and remarkable for the greatest and most extensive goodness. There is not one bad action to be found in his history ; not the least stain upon his character ; not the least imperfection in his virtue. Though he led an active life, passed through various scenes, and stood in several relations, yet in each of them his conduct was wise, upright, righteous, beneficent, unblameable, and honourable. Those that knew him best call him, and with the greatest reason, “the holy and just One ;” and tell us that “he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth ;” that he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” Yea, he appeals himself to his most inveterate enemies, “Which of you convinceth me of sin ?” Let us view him as “a preacher of righteousness,” and he did that well. He preached the most important truths, and that in a manner adapted to enlighten the understanding, to warm and mend the heart. He knew the size of the understandings of his hearers, and brought down his instructions to their level. In his discourses there was such plainness and simplicity, united with such grandeur and sublimity, that it is no wonder his hearers were struck in an unusual manner, and could not but say, “Never man spake like this man.” His common conversation, likewise, was always adapted to “minister grace to the hearers.” No superfluous talk, no vain compliments, no low scandal : it was always kind and mild ; always holy and instructive. Through a whole life of free conversation with all sorts of men, not one sentiment was uttered, unbecoming a preacher of righteousness, a teacher sent from God. View him as a worker of miracles, and he did them well. His miraculous cures were all effectual and perfect. His mighty works were all friendly and beneficent : friendly to the souls as well as the bodies of men ; being adapted to awaken their attention, convince their judgments, and influence their hearts. No wonder “the multitude marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel,” that land of miracles : no wonder that, as we are told, “they glorified the God of Israel.”

II. *Christ's actions were performed with good designs.*

Both from good principles, and for good ends. Some actions, apparently good in themselves, may proceed from bad dispositions of heart, and be done to serve some mean and sinister ends. This was remarkably the case with the most shining actions of the scribes and pharisees in our Lord's time. Therefore he so often reproved their hypocrisy, and compared them to "whited sepulchres, beautiful without, but within full of corruption." He was not intent, as they were, on making proselytes to himself, as the head of a party. His zeal was not a cloke for pride and covetousness. His aim was not to advance his own reputation or secular interest. Every man is more or less moved by selfish passions; and they influence him in almost every thing he doth. But Jesus in no one action consulted his own interest only; but showed, by his contempt of riches, greatness, and popular applause, that he was truly and transcendently rich, great, and honourable. He flattered not the wealthy and the learned, but with undaunted courage exposed their hypocrisy. His aim was to honour his heavenly Father. His "meat was to do the will of God." He showed on all occasions the highest veneration, love, obedience, and submission to his Father, and endeavoured to glorify him by promoting the like dispositions in others. His end was to serve mankind in their best interests; to rescue them from the slavery of ignorance, superstition, and vice, and diffuse knowledge, holiness, and happiness among them. He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister;" "not to destroy men's lives, but to save them, and to give his own life a ransom for many."

III. *Christ's actions were performed in an amiable and graceful manner.*

The word "well" in the text signifies, not only right and good, but lovely and beautiful. There is a manner of performing good actions, which gives them a lustre and grace, and renders even beneficence itself more agreeable. Our Lord's actions were performed with the greatest prudence, tenderness, modesty, and devotion. More particularly,—there was a constant prudence in our Lord's manner of acting; a wise regard to times and places, persons and circumstances; so that he might give no unnecessary offence, but take men by the proper handle. This particularly appears in his representing unacceptable truths under parables. They were performed also with great compassion and tenderness. Thus in the case of the deaf man before us, our Lord "sighed" (v. 24); pitying his most deplorable circumstances. He sought opportunities of doing good and conferring benefits. He did it freely and without reward. He showed his compassion to the multitude in many instances, and treated even notorious offenders with all the tenderness consistent with fidelity. This won

upon the hearts of many. He likewise did things with great modesty and humility. He took this patient, in particular, "aside from the multitude" (v. 33). And when the cure was wrought, "charged them that they should tell no man." And this it was that principally led them to say "He hath done all things well." Charmed with the modesty which engaged him to conceal his own praise, "so much the more they published it" (v. 36). He left his actions to speak for themselves. He put on no ostentatious airs; never sought his own applause; never called the people about him to see and admire his miracles; never said, with Jehu, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord." He was not elated with the applauses bestowed upon him. In the whole of his conduct "he was meek and lowly in heart," and this added a beauty to all his discourses and all his actions. Further, they were performed with great devotion. And this, in the eyes of all serious persons, gave them a peculiar excellence. In performing this miracle, "he looked up to heaven" (v. 34); to intimate to the patient, whence all benefits come: for he could not give a deaf man that idea by words. He prayed when he raised Lazarus, and probably when he wrought other miracles; to direct the thoughts of the spectators to the God of heaven, from whom "every good and perfect gift proceedeth." Thus it appeared that he referred all to God, and sought his glory in every thing he did: and this, in the judgment of the wise and good, added a grace and a charm to it. I am to add once more,

IV. *This was the case with all his actions.*

Whatever the persons speaking in the text might particularly refer to, we have the highest reason to adopt their words in the most extensive sense, and say, "He did all things well," without one single exception. The established teachers among the Jews, though they were held in great veneration, were in many respects very faulty. Yea, there never was a divinely commissioned teacher, but himself, concerning whom this could be said. The greatest heroes and saints recorded in scripture had their failings and blemishes; Moses and the prophets were men of like passions with us, and said and did some things ill. This was the case of the apostles also. But the conduct of Jesus was uniform, consistent, and all of a piece. He was the same in every place and every circumstance. In public assemblies, in his private converse with his friends, he was pure without stain, strict without severity, cheerful without levity, yea he was altogether lovely. His whole life was conducted with that wisdom, and supported with that dignity, which became the Son of God, the Teacher and Saviour of men. "It was a life, the greatest and best that ever was led by man, or ever was the subject of history."* Could we have examined it thoroughly in all its parts

* Macknight.

and connexions, it would appear in this light: and the more we study it, the greater reason we shall have to say, "He hath done all things well." His actions were all good—performed with good designs—and in a most amiable manner—and this was the character of all his actions.

APPLICATION.

I now proceed to the practical improvement we are to make of this subject. And it shall be in these inferences. How unjust was the treatment our Lord met with in the world. How worthy is he of our admiration, reverence, and love. And how fit is it that we should imitate this excellent and lovely pattern.

1. *How unjust was the treatment our Lord met with in the world.* The slight and imperfect view we have been taking of his character and conduct, is sufficient to convince us, that he came from God, and that God was with him. It shows that he was no deceiver. There have been impostors in the world, who have deceived multitudes: but what impostor ever did *all* things well? Notwithstanding his utmost caution and artifice, his base designs will sometimes appear, and the wise and the judicious at least will see and abhor them. But we behold Jesus passing through many scenes and circumstances, with equal integrity, wisdom, and dignity; without one fault, one imperfection, either in deed or word; publishing the most excellent doctrines and important precepts, and behaving with the greatest prudence, decency, and humility. Yet notwithstanding this, he was charged as a deceiver, a blasphemer, a confederate with Satan. But, as some of the wiser Jews themselves argued, his were "not the words of a man who had a devil." How could "a man that was a sinner" do such miracles, and do them in so graceful a manner? "If this man were not of God he could do nothing:" nothing like what he did. Could he be a confederate with Satan, when it was the whole business of his life to weaken his kingdom, to glorify God, and do good to men? Who would not lament the corruption of human nature, that any should be found base and malicious enough to defame so lovely a character? Who would not lament the wickedness of that generation of men, who could vilify, insult, and crucify this holy One, the Lord of glory, and put him to death as an evil-doer, who had done all things well! But it is more strange and lamentable still, that any who are born in a Christian and protestant land, and are not under the power of those prejudices by which the Jews were influenced, should venture to asperse such a character; artfully attempt to weaken the evidences of his mission, and ridicule his laws and institutions. Yet such have been found in Britain, and I fear there are yet some of this malevolent disposition. But I imagine that it is his having

done all things well, that displeaseth them. The purity of his precepts and the lustre of his example pain and mortify them. They therefore endeavour to persuade themselves and others that he was a deceiver, and, hating truth, they "will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." Let the view we have been taking of the spotless character of our Redeemer confirm our faith in him and his holy religion: for, as one of the writers of his life tells us, "it was written, that ye might believe, that Jesus is the Christ," the promised Messiah, "the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life, through his name," John xx. 30.

2. *How worthy is Christ of our admiration, reverence, and love.* When we read the history, and hear of his conduct and his love, I hope our hearts also say, "He hath done all things well." But it is very likely that some of those persons, who "were beyond measure astonished," and said this, did not believe in him and become his disciples; yea might afterwards be of the number of those who said, "Crucify him." Let it be our care not only to admire and applaud him, but to cherish those affections to him, which his great qualifications and works demand. In order to this, let us consider how nearly we are connected with him. We call him our Lord and Saviour. He is our head, and we are the members of his body. And this surely will excite us to take pleasure in reflecting on the excellency of his character, and the wonders of his love. We are pleased with some faint goodness in men, and can hardly help reverencing and loving a worthy character. How much doth he deserve our highest esteem and affection, who was a complete model of worth and goodness, and whose perfections were all employed in our service and for our happiness! When we observe the beauty and grandeur which appeared in all his actions, our hearts must be hard and unfeeling, if they are not struck with admiration and filled with joy: yea if sincere and fervent gratitude and love do not mingle themselves with our admiration and joy. His unblameable, amiable conduct adds authority to his doctrines, and weight to his precepts: and they must have no sense of true excellency, who do not see a glory in Christ, superior to that of every name which makes a figure in history, and who do not feel that he is inestimably precious to their souls. Let us also give thanks unto God, for such a teacher, for such an example of attractive goodness, universal righteousness and charity. "Thanks be unto God for this his unspeakable gift!"

3. *How fit is it that we imitate this excellent and lovely pattern.* It was not to raise our wonder, and entertain our curiosity, that the life of Christ was written by four of his followers. It was not for this purpose that the chief lines of it have been now set before you: but all is intended to engage our imitation. The leading design of all which hath been said is, to urge upon you

this exhortation, "Go ye and do likewise." The heathen philosophers were complained of by some of their contemporaries, that they acted contrary to their own precepts. And our Lord charges it upon the Jewish teachers, that "they said and did not," Matt. xxiii. 3. But all his own precepts were beautifully exemplified in his conduct. He was a perfect model, as well as a perfect teacher, of righteousness. His pattern is suited to us, and proper for our imitation. It is not false to mislead us, nor dazzling to confound us. It is the example of one who, though he had no superior and no rival in the excellencies of his character, was found in fashion as a man; subject to the pains, necessities, frailties, and temptations of mankind. Indeed in some parts of his conduct we cannot attempt to imitate him, without ignorance, presumption, and blasphemy. In what was peculiar to his character as a divine teacher and the Messiah, we cannot resemble him. But in his general conduct as a man; in what he did, as a partaker of human nature, he may and ought to be imitated by us. He hath proposed himself to us as our example. "If any man will come after me, let him follow me." "Learn of me," saith he, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you." His apostles recommended him to our imitation. St. Paul saith, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." "He hath left us," saith Peter, "an example, that we should follow his steps." "He that saith he abideth in him," St. John observes, "ought also to walk as he walked." By becoming like him, we become what we ought to be, and what we must be, if we desire to be happy with him for ever. Let us then trace his shining character, and endeavour to resemble him. For instance: let our actions be good, just, and holy: else our wearing his name will be our shame and reproach. Let "Holiness to the Lord" be inscribed upon all we do, and nothing inconsistent with Christian purity, integrity, meekness, and love be ever found in us. Let us be all always careful whatever we do, to do it well; from the best principles; from the fear and love of God, a sense of his presence, a reverence for his authority, and a desire to please and glorify him. Otherwise men may say it is done well, and God, that it is done ill. They may reckon some of those actions virtuous and commendable, for which he may condemn us.

Let us also attend to the manner in which our actions are done. There are many great and lamentable imprudences in sincere Christians. By reason of these their profession is dishonoured, their good spoken evil of, and their real excellencies have less force and influence than they would otherwise have. There should be, if I may so express it, a decency and politeness even in religion: a graceful manner of performing good actions, which a wise man will not neglect, and which will

command the esteem and respect of the ungodly : while the infirmities and imperfections of some holy men tarnish their virtues and lessen their characters. It is our duty to "provide things honourable in the sight of all men." Attend, therefore, to the apostle's exhortation, "Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report ; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things."

And finally, let it be our concern and most diligent endeavour, to do *all* things well ; to maintain a steady and consistent character ;—to have our conduct in every respect good and commendable, and all of a piece. There is a beauty and glory in such a conduct, which will render our friendly admonitions and example forcible, and will adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. What pity is it that so many Christians, and some that one would hope are sincere, are a strange mixture ; a self-contradiction ! They possess some shining qualities, and manifest some mean and contemptible ones. Pride, passion, ill-nature, peevishness, and uncharitableness, are often appearing, amidst a conscientious regard to religious institutions and strict justice ; yea, amidst many acts of generosity and charity. Some are too fond of the world ; too eager of its profits ; too impatient under losses and disappointments. Some deal in evil-speaking and low scandal : and some make very unbecoming encroachments upon truth, who would abhor a malicious or a direct lie. But, "my brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth the same fountain send forth bitter and sweet water ?" Were any irregularities of this kind found in our divine Master ? Do not his precepts, doth not his example, forbid them ? Let us labour to be blameless and harmless, as the disciples of Christ, without rebuke ; and strive to be complete in all the will of God. Indeed if we are so, we cannot please all men ; but must expect some of that hard treatment which our Lord met with. His resolution in a good cause cost him his liberty and his life. Herein we are to imitate him ; to be steady and firm, where conscience and religion are concerned, and compliment no man at the expense of these. And if the world should say we do things ill, it is sufficient that God will say of us, "Well done, good and faithful servants." To conclude. Let us be deeply humbled before God, that we manifest so little of the temper of Christ, though we have read and heard so much of it. Let us diligently study his history and contemplate his example, that we may derive both light and warmth from it. And may his Spirit be communicated to us, to form us to his bright resemblance. And thus (as the apostle expresseth it) "we, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord Jesus, may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18. Amen.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ABRAHAM'S DESIRE AND JOY TO SEE CHRIST'S DAY.

JOHN VIII. 56.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

It is a common thing for those to be proud of their hereditary honours, who act basely themselves; and to boast of the virtues of their ancestors, when they have none of their own. But no nation ever carried this vanity and weakness to such a height as the Jews. Abraham was the friend of God, and highly honoured by him: and because the Jews descended from this holy patriarch, they not only looked upon themselves as more honourable than other nations, but thought their relation to him would be a security to them from national calamities, yea, from the punishment of a future state, though they were ever so wicked. From this groundless conceit in part, they rejected the evidences our Lord gave of his divine mission. And in his discourse with them in this chapter, he is showing them how foolish their reasonings, and how vain their hopes, from their relation to Abraham, were. He tells them, if they were genuine children of Abraham, they would do his works; readily receive a divine revelation, which was confirmed by sufficient evidence, as Abraham did. Our Lord had told them if they "received and kept his sayings, they should not see death," that is, should be raised to eternal life. They then ask him, if he was greater than Abraham and the prophets who were dead. Our Lord replies that it was their ignorance of God, which led them to reject his Son; and that their "father Abraham rejoiced to see his day, and saw it and was glad," q. d. You despise me as unworthy your notice; but he valued me. He rejoiced to see my day, having had some discoveries of it made to him. But you do not discern my day and bid it welcome, now it is come. This was a proof that they were not Abraham's children: for they scorned that which he desired; and rejected that in which he rejoiced. This assertion of our Lord, my brethren, needs and deserves some illustration; as it may throw a light upon many parts of the Old Testament, especially the history of Abraham, and the covenant made with him; and will suggest some very important instructions. Let us then consider,

- I. The object of Abraham's desire—to see Christ's day.
- II. The gratification of that desire—he saw it.—And,
- III. The effect it had upon him—he was glad.—Let us consider,

I. The object of Abraham's desire.

I say "desire," for, in the judgments of the best critics, the word here rendered "rejoiced," should be translated he "earnestly desired:" so the Eastern versions render it: and indeed it is necessary to understand it thus, in order to avoid the evident tautology which appears in our version. Let us then consider what is meant by Christ's day, and how Abraham stood affected towards it.

What is meant by Christ's day, will appear from the frequent use of the word "day" in scripture. We read of the days of Noah and Lot; which refers not only to the times in which they lived, but to the events of those times. We frequently meet with this expression in the prophecies, "In that *day*" shall this and the other event happen; which refers to the whole period of the Christian dispensation. So that the "day of Christ" must here signify his appearance on earth, and the events of his life; what he was to do and teach and suffer; and more particularly refers to those grand events, which were peculiarly characteristic of his office and employment; namely, his death and resurrection as the Saviour of sinners. It will likewise include the dispensation he was to introduce; the covenant of grace which he was to publish, enlarge, and establish, and the blessedness he was to bestow upon his people. The text implies that some discoveries of these things had already been made to Abraham. As soon as ever he was called to leave his kindred, God promised that "in him all the families of the earth should be blessed," Gen. xii. 3. This promise was several times repeated, with this addition, that "in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." St. Paul tells us, that "the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel to Abraham; saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed," Gal. iii. 8. And when God promised to be a God to his seed, it intimated that they should be taken into the covenant of grace, and be heirs of eternal life. God was "not ashamed to be called their God, as he had provided for them a city." Now these discoveries filled Abraham with wonder. He reflected on them with pleasure. He knew these promises contained great things; and they raised his expectations of something very glorious, which was in future ages to be revealed and offered to the world. He rejoiced that these discoveries were made to him, and he earnestly desired, or vehemently wished, as the word signifies, to know more of them. He stretched himself forth and leaped forward with joy, to meet the object of his wishes; hoping and longing for some further revelation of Christ's day. Indeed a state of desire is generally a state of uneasiness; but that is often abundantly overbalanced by the prospect of enjoying the desired good. When we hear of something great and considerable which is going on now, or is to be done in some distant period, it is natural for us to in-

quire and wish to know, when, and how, and by whom, it is to be done. Though we have but obscure intimations of it, our curiosity is raised : and when our expectation of any blessing approacheth towards certainty, it occasions great pleasure. Thus Abraham had set his heart upon Christ's day. That it might come, was the object of his warmest desire, and he was eager to know more of it. He wanted to be informed more particularly, what that seed of his was, in whom the nations were to be blessed ; and what was the principal blessedness which they were to enjoy. He was borne on with desire to know something of the great transactions of his life, by whom the blessing was to be procured from all nations, and of the happy state into which the world should be brought by it. And as he himself was blessed by being converted from idolatry to the knowledge and practice of true religion, he could not but conclude, that this was the distinguishing blessing to be conferred on his seed ; and therefore he was solicitous to know how and by whom it was to be brought about. Let us consider,

II. *The gratification or fulfilling of his desire.*

He saw Christ's day. Now this intimates that God was pleased to reveal more of it to Abraham than he had known before. Though there be nothing said in his history of any immediate discoveries of this kind made to him, yet our Lord, who was before Abraham, and knew what he saw, better than Moses did, plainly intimates, that his desire was gratified, and his joy was increased. God perhaps was pleased to reveal to him some circumstances relating to the coming of Christ, the great end of his appearance, the nature of that covenant which was made with himself and his seed ; and particularly that it included all those of every nation, who should receive and believe the gospel. I imagine that he might have a distinct foresight of the principal transactions of Christ's life, and the happy state into which the world was to be brought by the gospel. And there were several circumstances in his own life, which might, by the operations of the Spirit of God upon his mind, lead him to see the chief mysteries of the gospel. Perhaps, for instance, from the respect he showed to Melchisedeck, as a king and the priest of the most high God, and a blessing he received from him, the Spirit of God might direct his thoughts in a lively manner to Jesus Christ, as "a priest upon a throne," who was to bless all the faithful servants of God. By his earnest intercession for Sodom, he might be led to understand something of the successful mediation of Christ in behalf of perishing sinners. He might be led to understand his casting out Hagar and Ishmael at the divine command, as a type and representation of the unbelieving Jews being cast out of God's family, and the believing gentiles, as children of the free-woman, being taken in and

made heirs of the heavenly inheritance: for so the apostle tells us it was. But there was no event more likely to give him a true and large idea of the leading design of the gospel, than his offering up his son Isaac. His thoughts might be led, by this affecting scene, to the death of Christ, as a sacrifice for sin, and to see the wonderful love of God therein: and Isaac's being taken alive from the altar, would be a proper emblem of Christ's resurrection and his being thus declared to be the Son of God with power. A learned writer * hath endeavoured to prove, by many ingenious and plausible arguments, that this was the sole end for which he was commanded to offer Isaac; and that to this, and this alone, our Lord refers in the text. He supposes, that this command was designed to inform Abraham in a symbolical manner, that is, by signs and actions instead of words, that Christ was to be a sacrifice for the redemption of the world. He argues this also from the words of the apostle; "By faith Abraham offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure," Heb. xi. 19, or in a parable or representation, as the word signifies: that is, it was designed to be typical of the sacrifice of Christ. But whether this was the chief design of God in commanding him to offer up his son, or any part of the design, God might, and I imagine did, lead his views from this transaction to the death of the Messiah, which was to be accomplished in future ages. And the deliverance of Isaac from death, and the prospect of Christ's suffering for the redemption of the world and rising from the dead, being thus united, would give him peculiar delight. If he did not see Christ's day in this symbolical representation, he saw it by faith in the promises which God had given to him: the general meaning of these he understood, by some impressions which were made upon his mind of the future events relating to Christ and his gospel. His faith supplied the place of sight; and put a present reality into these things. Though the objects were obscurely revealed, and many ages were to intervene before they were fully discovered, yet by faith he saw them; was as sure that they would appear, as if he had actually seen them. And this gave him joy: which is the next thing we are to consider.

III. *The effect which these discoveries had upon Abraham.*

"He saw it and was glad." The word translated "rejoiced" may signify the pleasure which the expectation of some approaching blessing occasions. The word, "he was glad," denotes the calm, settled joy which ariseth from our knowledge of its worth, and obtaining the possession of it. It was doubtless a great pleasure to Abraham, that God had condescended so far, and

* Bishop Warburton.

honoured him so much, as to gratify his desire. He could not but look upon it as a peculiar token of the divine favour to *him*. He reckoned it a great honour to be the father of many nations; but undoubtedly rejoiced more when he found, that the church of God was to descend from him and to be named after him; and that the redeemer of the world was to arise out of his family. He was glad, for the sake of his natural seed, that the Jews were to be the peculiar people of God, and be honoured with so many marks of the divine favour, in order to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, who was to be the glory, the greatest glory of God's people Israel. It may likewise be very naturally concluded, from the known benevolence of Abraham's temper, that it would give him great joy to be informed, that Christ was to be for "salvation to the ends of the earth;" that the gospel was not to be confined to his natural seed; but that all who believed it, should become God's covenant people and "Abraham's seed according to the promise," that is, to be blessed by Christ Jesus. But his generous heart must rejoice most in this, that the blessings of the covenant were not only to reach to every believing generation to the end of time, but to terminate in a happy eternity; in the possession of that "better country, that heavenly one," of which Canaan was a type, and which, as the apostle tells us, Abraham and the other patriarchs sought and expected: in the faith of which they died, "not having received the things promised, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them and embraced them," Heb. xi. 13.

Before we proceed to the improvement of this subject, I would observe, that this hint of our Lord in the text gives us reason to believe, that the patriarchs and Jewish prophets knew more of the gospel than we could conclude from the Old Testament alone, and had clearer discoveries made to them of the blessings of it than are there expressed. I make no doubt but David and other pious Jews saw beyond the outside and letter of the law, into the typical sense and meaning of many appointments of it: and through its glimmering shadows and resemblances, they beheld very much of the substance and glory of the gospel; more than they were permitted to record. This might arise partly from their careful study of the prophets, who wrote before them; but it was principally an honour which God put upon their devout meditations and prayers, by showing them these things: for, as St. Peter observeth, "they searched what, or what manner of time, the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify," 1 Pet. i. 11. To this perhaps the Psalmist may refer when he saith, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him;" and when he prays, "Open mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law;" that I may have a glimpse of those glorious secrets of the gospel, which are wrapt up in the precepts and rites of the law. This greatly contributed to the

pleasure they found in the scriptures and in God's ordinances; and which they so strongly and devoutly express in their writings. This led David and the prophets to speak of Christ and his gospel in such high terms, and to express so much joy in the prospect of those blessings which he should bring to the world. This hint should be made familiar to your minds.*

APPLICATION.

Let me now show to what useful purposes this subject is to be improved.

1. *Let us bless God that we see Christ's day so clearly; so much more plainly, distinctly, and perfectly, than Abraham did.* On this account our Lord congratulated his disciples: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see. For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them," Luke x. 24. The clearest discoveries that were made of them to any of these prophets and kings, even to Abraham and David, could hardly be called sight, in comparison with theirs. Nay, we see them more fully than the disciples themselves had at that time done. For Christianity was but just opening upon them. The principal truths of it, those I mean relating to the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, and the offices and work of the Spirit, were only hinted at, till after the resurrection of Christ. We have the whole plan of Christianity distinctly set before us in the New Testament; and its most important blessings are represented to us in the Christian sacraments; that our senses may help our faith, and encourage our hope. If Abraham so much rejoiced to see the little of Christ's day which he saw, how transporting would his joy have been to have seen and heard and read what we do! What obligations then are we under to the divine goodness, which hath determined that we should live in that happy day of light and liberty, when the gospel shines around us in all its lustre, and we have so many advantages for understanding and improving it! Glory be to God in the highest, that there is peace on earth and good-will to men; and that we partake of this inestimable blessing! We learn,

2. *How wretched is their state who have no desire after Christ, or will take no pains to be acquainted with those things which gave Abraham so much satisfaction.* It is the character of too many, who are called Christians, that their desires centre upon other things. To see wealth flowing in upon them; their families making a figure in the world; and to have opportunities of enjoying what they call pleasure. Their eager wishes for these things bear them through labour, difficulty, and reproach.

* Scott's Christian Life, vol. v. p. 196.

Their success transports them with joy, and makes their eyes lofty, and their hearts haughty. This was not the character of Abraham. God promised him a fruitful land; that his family should be numerous and enjoy it; that a race of princes should descend from him, and that his name should be great. Yet he was never transported with desire and joy to see these events. But to see Christ's day seems to have been his highest ambition; while many Christians mind nothing but earthly things; have no time to spare for studying the scriptures, and no inclination to the work. Public worship seems to be a burden rather than a pleasure to them. And instead of retiring and meditating on the things of Christ, which they have heard at it, they seem to court any company or amusement, that may banish these important truths from their thoughts. They can scarcely help gaining some knowledge of Christ; but it is very small, and not sufficient to lead them to make him the object of their love and confidence. They are without Christ; they look not attentively upon him, nor truly believe in him; though these dispositions are absolutely necessary to their obtaining eternal life by him. What can we say to such a conduct, but that "the god of this world hath blinded their eyes?" They are sunk in ignorance, sensuality, and an earthly spirit. So that what Abraham, the friend of God, so earnestly desired, they desire not; and what even "angels themselves desire to look into," hath little or no effect upon their carnal senseless hearts. These objects, though so great and glorious in themselves, do not affect them. They are not suited to their taste; for they "savour not the things that be of God." He hath written unto them the great things of his law, and the greater things of his gospel; but they have accounted them *strange things*. As far as this is the case with any of you, sirs, your case is pitiable, and your characters are wretched. You may call yourselves Christians, and boast of your relation to Christ, as the Jews did of being Abraham's children: but it may be said of you, as Christ said of them, "Ye are of your father the devil, and ye do his works." If you were Christians indeed, you would highly value the gospel; you would study it carefully; you would, with St. Paul, "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord;" and esteem all earthly gain, honour, and pleasure, but as "dung that you may win Christ, and be found in him." Think and boast what you will, you will never be acquainted with true pleasure, till you are savingly acquainted with Christ Jesus.

3. *Those who have seen something of Christ will earnestly desire to see more.* This was the case with Abraham. God had let in a little light upon his mind, and he was impatient for more. Thus Christians, to whom Christ hath been revealed,—who have any good acquaintance with the wonderful things he

hath done for mankind, the unsearchable riches of his grace, and the invaluable blessings he hath to bestow for time and eternity, and who have been led to seek an interest in him, will desire to be further acquainted with those delightful things which are wrapt up in the mysteries of the gospel. They will desire this not only to gratify their curiosity and give pleasure to the mind, but as it hath a transforming efficacy upon their hearts, and tends to increase their holiness. I hope some of you are in this respect men of wisdom. And I entreat you to cherish fervent desires after growth in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is, as the text intimates, a joy which attends desiring and thirsting after fuller manifestation of the Redeemer's glory. Though searching after truth is laborious, yet the new discoveries which will be continually made, richly reward the labour; especially when a sufficient certainty of important truths and principles is attained. If this desire be cherished, it will excite you to use the proper means of improvement in this heavenly science. You will search the scriptures daily; not only read them, but meditate upon them, and endeavour to understand their meaning and design; since they testify of Christ and eternal life. You will be constant and devout in attending Christian ordinances, especially the Lord's Supper, where you see more of Christ and the grace of the gospel than in any other service. You will likewise earnestly pray for the influences of the Spirit; that he would "take of the things of Christ and show them to you;" that your understanding being enlightened, ye may know more clearly "what is the hope of your calling." To excite and increase in you this holy ambition to see more of Christ, consider that there is room for everlasting improvement in the knowledge of him; that there are height and length and breadth in the love of Christ, which pass all knowledge; and that as you improve in it, your joy will abound. Let it be further considered, that your desires will be gratified. God is ready to give his Holy Spirit to them that *ask* it. To him that hath shall be given; and "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." In many other respects, "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow;" but he that groweth in the knowledge of Christ, will find his pleasure and his holiness increased; and, which is a most important thought, be capable of enjoying greater happiness in the heavenly world. I add, once more,

4. *They who have seen and known Christ have great reason to rejoice.* They who have seen him, so as to believe in him and fix the confidence of their souls upon him, have a solid foundation for joy. So the apostle saith, "Whom having not seen with your bodily eyes, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Pet. i. 7. You have the joy of faith, and there is no joy like

it. Have you seen this Saviour to be yours, and have you just ground to believe that you have an interest in him? "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." For this holy joy will enlarge your hearts in duty, and strengthen you against the temptations of life. It will cool your ardour after the world, and take your hearts off from carnal joys; of which you will say, as one of the fathers, "How pleasant is it to want these pleasures!" Abraham was glad to see Christ's day; and no doubt it reconciled him to his pilgrimage state, and to the prospect of those sufferings, which his posterity was for a while to endure in Egypt. Thus should the Christian rejoice in Christ Jesus; in seasons of bodily affliction, and perplexity and distress of mind: since, because Christ is his, "things present, and things to come, life and death" are his, in him he may rejoice, even in death itself; and say, as good Simeon, when he embraced his young Redeemer, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." By these exercises of faith and love and holy joy, you will be training up for that world in which brighter discoveries of Christ will be made to his people; where "they shall see his face," "be with him where he is, and behold his glory." In the meantime, may all our views of Christ be improved to the furthering our holiness and likeness to him, and training us up for this felicity and glory! Amen.

DISCOURSE IX.

THE FOXES AND BIRDS BETTER ACCOMMODATED THAN CHRIST.

MATT. VIII. 20.

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

THERE is a strong inclination in mankind to inquire into minute circumstances of the lives of those who have been eminent for piety, learning, or wit; or have made great improvements in any art or science. Though this inclination may arise from mere curiosity, yet, as it is innocent in itself, and the gratification of it may answer some valuable purposes, those who have written the lives of such persons have generally endeavoured to gratify it. But there is this peculiar in the life and history of our Lord Jesus Christ, that every circumstance of it, however minute, is entertaining and instructive; and there is no point of light in which we can view his character, but it appears truly illustrious, and full of wisdom, dignity, and goodness. We have one circumstance of it in the text, which perhaps hath been as

little considered as any other, yet may suggest some important instruction. Our Lord, being fatigued with the great multitude which crowded about him, "gave commandment to depart to the other side of the lake," near which he had been preaching and healing. As he was going towards the ship, a certain scribe, or doctor of the law, whose business it was to interpret and explain it, came to him; and, expecting to gain wealth and honour in the service of one who, he imagined, would soon appear as a glorious and triumphant prince, he saith to him, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest;" and devote myself entirely to the service of thy kingdom. Jesus, knowing his mean and mercenary views, saith to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," and therefore ye are not to expect riches and honours from me. We hear no more of this forward man; probably he went away sorrowful. But the story is recorded for our admonition; and in the answer to him we may observe,

I. Christ's remark on the provision made for the habitation of the inferior creatures: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests."

II. His representation of his own destitute circumstances: "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head." I shall illustrate these two particulars, and then show what useful lessons we may learn from them. Let us consider,

I. *Christ's remark on the provision made for the habitation of the inferior creatures.*

"The foxes have holes," &c. Men, having reason and understanding, are able to contrive and build convenient habitations for themselves; and Providence hath furnished them with a variety of trees, earths, stones, and plants, in all places of the world, for this use. Yet suitable provision is also made for the inferior creatures to have convenient dwellings, wherein to repose, and breed, and nourish their young. Tame domestic animals are thus accommodated by the care of man, as being more immediately serviceable to him; but wild beasts and birds have also suitable accommodations. They are directed by instinct to proper places, where to bring forth and nurse their young and secure themselves; because they want such security, being sought out by man to be taken and destroyed, or by other animals to feed upon. Thus the foxes have holes; and we read in scripture that "the rabbits" or field-mice (as some interpret the word) "are but a feeble folk," and easily destroyed when taken, "yet they make their *houses* in the rock," Prov. xxx. 26. "The high hills," saith the Psalmist, "are a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the conies." The birds have also convenient habitations. Some make their nests upon inaccessible rocks. "The eagle maketh her nest on high. She dwelleth and abideth

on the rock, upon the crag of the rock and the strong place," Job xxxix. 27. Others fly to the habitations of men, and seek their shelter in some parts of our dwellings. "There the sparrow finds a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young." Other birds make their nests in trees or bushes; in the highest trees, where they cannot easily be reached, or the thickest bushes, where they cannot easily be seen; as if they rationally contrived to keep them from being destroyed. "In the trees the birds make their nests; as for the stork, the fir trees are her house," Ps. civ. 17. Some make their nests on the ground, amidst the shrubs and grass of the earth. "By the rivulets of water the fowls of the heaven have their habitations, which sing among the branches," Ps. civ. 12. Their sagacity in discovering proper places for their nests is very remarkable, and more so their skill and dexterity in making them. Before we proceed to the other particular in our text, let us pause a little, and reflect upon the wisdom and goodness of God which is herein apparent. How wonderfully are these displayed in the provision made for the convenience and security of beasts and birds! That these creatures are governed by an instinct implanted by the Creator, is very evident; considering that all of the same species provide and furnish their dwellings in the same manner, and have done so in every age. What besides an unerring instinct, implanted and guided by an over-ruling Providence, could direct these creatures to choose their different but suitable habitations? With what contrivance do the foxes and some other animals dig holes in the earth; and generally under rocks or large trees, in order to be more secure! "With what inimitable art," as a pious naturalist observes, "do the poor untaught birds lay a parcel of rude sticks and straws, moss and dirt together, and form them into commodious nests! With what curiosity do they line them within; wind and place every hair, feather, or lock of wool, to guard the tender bodies of themselves and young, and keep them warm! With what art do many of them thatch them over, and plaister and coat them round, to guard and fence them against the injuries of the weather, as well as to deceive the eye of spectators!"* These excellent ends which they pursue, and the admirable art which they exert, are undoubtedly none of their own; but owing to that adorable Being, who gives irrational as well as rational creatures wisdom; who is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Again, how great is that goodness which hath made such ample provision for the continuance, support, and comfort of these creatures! How abundantly are they furnished with clothing, food, and lodging by the universal Parent! They are all part of his family, and not the meanest orders of them

* Derham.

are overlooked or unprovided for by him. How widely doth he diffuse happiness, and how kindly preserve beasts and birds as well as men ! “They all wait upon him, and he openeth his hand and filleth them with good.” These instances proclaim the Creator’s wisdom, bounty, and kindness; and we must reflect upon them with great coldness, if they do not lead us to say with the Psalmist, “O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! In wisdom hast thou made them all. The earth is full of thy riches ; and thy tender mercies are over all thy works.” Let us consider,

II. *Christ’s representation of his own destitute circumstances.*

“The Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” That illustrious person, prophesied of by Daniel under that title, whose kingdom and sufferings and glory he foresaw, and whose dignity he celebrated,—this illustrious person, when he appeared on earth, was “partaker of flesh and blood, and found in fashion as a man; yea, in the likeness of sinful flesh,” Rom. viii. 3. He was exposed to the common infirmities and hazards of human nature; to hunger and thirst and weariness. He was under a necessity of recruiting his animal powers by sleep; and was as liable to suffer by the inclemency of weather and seasons as other men. Consequently he needed the same conveniences and accommodations. But he was often destitute of them. He was born in mean circumstances. A stable was his bed chamber; a manger his cradle. His whole life was a life of poverty. After he appeared in public, as a preacher of righteousness, he was indebted to the generosity of men for his support; for we read of those “who ministered to him of their substance.” He possessed not a large estate nor a stately palace; nay, he had no house; not so much as a cottage or hut, which he could call his own. He was beholden to others for his lodging, as well as his food; even to his own disciples, and particularly Lazarus. Some other generous friends might welcome him to their tables and their beds; but it is probable that he was sometimes destitute even of a lodging; as may perhaps be inferred from the circumstance of his sleeping in a fishing boat. So little was he regarded in the world ! For “he came to his own, but his own received him not.” The want of a convenient, warm, and agreeable lodging was peculiarly grievous, after he had been travelling many miles on foot; especially after he had been preaching to great multitudes, which he must do with an elevated voice; a work which those who are employed in it know to be very laborious, occasioning a great expense of spirits, and consequently requiring a recruit of comfortable sleep. In those circumstances to want suitable accommodations must be disagreeable and painful. Yet this was the case with our blessed Lord. While the beasts and the birds, even those which

are most wild and voracious, had proper habitations; and while almost every man hath a house or chamber of his own, to which he can return in the evening, and dwell securely and comfortably, "the Son of man had not where to lay his head." So destitute were his circumstances! Let us now attend to the useful lessons which we may learn from hence.

APPLICATION.

1. *How wise and faithful was Christ in this representation: and how much instruction doth it convey to his followers.* The cribe who addressed our Lord, declaring his purpose to follow him whithersoever he went, came in hopes of obtaining great preferment and honour in his kingdom. To put his sincerity to the trial, and to convince him how much he had mistaken the nature of that kingdom, Christ told him what his own condition was, and how vain were all expectations of wealth and grandeur from such a master. It is an evident proof of his wisdom and faithfulness, that he gave all his disciples fair warning what they must expect if they would adhere to his cause. Had he been an impostor, he would rather have flattered their expectations. If he had pursued temporal interests only, he would have promised his followers great things, and have said nothing of difficulties and dangers. On the contrary he told them, that "in the world they should have tribulation;" that "the world would hate them, as it had hated him." "If any man will come after me," saith he, "let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Yea, he requireth his disciples to relinquish father and mother, wife and children, houses and lands, yea, and their own lives also, when any of these come in competition with their duty to their Lord and master. It must be allowed, there was something peculiar in the case of the first Christians. They were exposed to particular trials and persecutions. Nevertheless the kingdom of Christ is not of this world now, any more than it was then; and, as the apostle observeth, "*all* that will live godly in Christ Jesus," all who are determined to be steadily good, "shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12. We learn therefore not to take up a hasty resolution to follow Christ and espouse his cause; but to weigh matters deliberately; to consider and count the cost; wisely to balance the profit and the loss. They that would be Christ's faithful, stedfast disciples must expect hardships, and prepare for them; be willing to bear all for his sake, and to take a part in his indigence and distress, if he calleth them to it. On these terms alone will he own us as his disciples. And unless this be seriously considered and laid down in our account, though we may "receive the word with joy and endure for a while," yet "when tribulation and persecution arise because of the word," we shall be "offended,"

and draw back. Let us therefore attend to the advice of the apostle: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind," 1 Pet. iv. 1.

2. *The condescension of Christ in submitting to these hardships is truly admirable.* "The Son of man had not where to lay his head." How wonderful was his grace in stooping so low! Let us consider who he was—"the Son of God; the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person." He laid the foundations of the earth; built this stately house, which the children of men inhabit, and raised the glorious fabric of nature; yet had not where to lay his head. One would have imagined that, upon his appearance, the kings of the earth would have offered him their thrones and their bed-chambers, and esteemed his presence the greatest glory of their palaces; that the lords and gentlemen of their bed-chambers would have waited upon him with the highest reverence and pleasure, and counted it their greatest honour to have performed the meanest office for him. But the princes of this world knew him not. Their proud and prejudiced minds did not discern the Son of God, the Prophet, and the Saviour, under his mean garb. Consider, further, how he had been accommodated and attended before he appeared on earth. He had, as St. John tells us, "been in the bosom of the Father," John i. 18, enjoyed inconceivable glory and happiness with him before the foundation of the world. The angels had waited on him and ministered to him; and he had the most glorious and honourable place in God's heavenly palace. As he could not but remember this, it must (to speak after the manner of men) make his destitute circumstances on earth peculiarly grievous; as none feel the burthen of poverty more than those who have lived in plenty and splendour. Consider further, why, and for whom, he submitted to this abasement. He had done nothing to deserve to be thus degraded, or to forfeit the least part of his original dignity and happiness. It was for us men, sinful, miserable men, that he laid aside his glory, submitted to the inconveniences of flesh, and the most grievous hardships and sufferings to which human nature is exposed. The apostle sums up these thoughts in that delightful, comprehensive passage, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich," 2 Cor. viii. 9. Surely such grace should excite our greatest veneration for him, and our most ardent love to him. View the Son of God wandering about like an outcast without an habitation; with few friends, and those mean and poor; despised and rejected of men; and all for our sakes: and certainly we must be destitute of ingenuity and gratitude, if we do not admire and adore his love, and endeavour to make him all the returns of love, duty, and obedience in our power. How

fit is it that we should enter into that devout and beautiful reflection, which one of the fathers makes upon our text, "O blessed Jesus, by how much the lower thou wast reduced for my sake, by so much the dearer shalt thou ever be unto me!"

3. *How reasonable is it that the disciples of Christ should be humble when they have, and contented when they have not, the comfortable accommodations of life.* When our Lord would recommend to his disciples a cheerful trust in the providence of God to supply their wants, he urgeth them to "consider the fowls of the air; they neither sow nor reap," nor have habitations provided for them by men; "yet your heavenly Father feedeth them," Matt. vi. 26. Are not men much better than fowls? Doth God take care of oxen, of foxes, of birds? Will he not much more take care of his rational creatures, and especially his children? But the text directs us to a more noble and instructive object of consideration. Behold the Son of God, the Lord of glory, the Favourite of heaven, "who went about doing good," yet "had not where to lay his head." He submitted to this, to show us the vanity of worldly wealth; how foolish it is for men to be proud of their fine houses, chambers, and beds, or boast of their furniture and elegancies. He designed to teach his disciples to seek better things, and to instruct them, that it was hardly worth their while to spend one anxious thought about those things, which engross the daily thoughts, cares, and labours of the generality of mankind. He submitted to these inconveniences, that he might be our example, and convince us that neither the elegancies nor conveniences of life are absolutely necessary to our happiness. Let those who have them be thankful for them, and not proud of them; remembering that foxes and birds are as well accommodated as they; as much to their own satisfaction, and all without their thought and expense. Let them not despise the poor, who want the comforts of life, for though they may be forced "to lodge without covering, and to embrace the rock for want of a shelter," Job xxiv. 7, 8, still they may be dear to God, the objects of his complacency, "rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath prepared for them that love him." Let this teach poor Christians to be contented with their mean accommodations. If you have houses of your own, brethren, though small and mean and poorly furnished; if you have beds to lie on of your own, or provided for you by your parents, masters, and mistresses, your friends, or even by the parish, you have more than Christ had, and are as well or better accommodated than he was. If you should even want a lodging, this has been the case of some of whom the world was not worthy, who, as the apostle observeth, "wandered in deserts, and mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth," Heb. 37. xi. No better provided for than the foxes, and like them also, sought after to be destroyed. It

was the case of the holy apostles, of whom one of them saith, "Even to this present hour we hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place," 1 Cor. iv. 11. It was also the case of our Lord Jesus; and "the disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord." It is enough for the disciple to be as his Master; and if he fare as his Master did, he hath no reason to complain. You may be happy, as he was, without a place where to lay your heads. "While this was our Lord's case, how truly great was he within himself! How much above the mean and unmanly desires of ambition, covetousness, or lust! He indulged himself in no carnal, sensual pleasures, it is true. But how calm that soul, which no angry or envious passion disturbed; where nothing but sacred love dwelt; the love of God, the love of men, and the rational and wise love of himself! How happy that soul, which was illuminated with divine knowledge, supported by an unshaken faith, and filled with joyful reflections and glorious hopes; that soul, which, full of God and full of heaven, had no room for uneasy cares or afflicting sorrows!"* If your minds like his are humble and contented, devout and serious, you will easily bear the want or loss of all things. You will not be alone, for the Father will be with you. You will find God your "dwelling-place" and your home, Ps. xc. 1. And though you have no lodging, his presence and love will "give you songs in the night," and turn the meanest place where you rest, into a Bethel, "a house of God," as they did the place where Jacob lay, though the ground was his bed and a stone his pillow. Thus St. Paul in the name of his fellow labourers, amidst their destitute and persecuted state, triumphantly declares, that "though sorrowful they were always rejoicing; as having nothing and yet possessing all things," 2 Cor. vi. 10. Let Christians learn from their Master and the apostles, "to be full and to be hungry, to abound and to suffer need, and in whatever state they are, therewith to be content." If poor Christians are tempted to consider their low circumstances as a proof of God's displeasure against them, or an evidence that they do not belong to him, let them look to Jesus and they will see that such a conclusion is false. Let them rather consider this circumstance as an evidence of God's paternal love; that they are the genuine disciples of him who was destitute, afflicted, and hath "called us to patience, because he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps." Once more,

4. *With how much pleasure should we think of the exaltation and glory of Christ in heaven.* He, who once had not where to lay his head, is now gone again into heaven, and "is sat down

* Dr. Lucas.

at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens." He is now "crowned with glory and honour: angels and principalities and powers being made subject unto him." When we think of the glorious alteration in his circumstances, it should be with pleasure; and we should rejoice on his account and on our own. We have reason to rejoice on his account. To rejoice with our fellow-creatures when they rejoice, is a very reasonable precept of his holy religion. As Christ shared so largely in our sorrows, yea bore our sins, and submitted to so many inconveniences and sufferings for our salvation, surely we should share in his joy. We should congratulate him, in our humble adorations, that he is so highly exalted, hath a name above every name, and authority, splendour, and felicity, superior to the highest angel. We have reason also to think with pleasure of his exaltation on our own account: for it is to be considered as an assurance, pledge, and earnest of the exaltation of all his faithful followers. Hence Christians are said to be "quickened with Christ," to be "raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus," Eph. ii. 5, 6. All his people shall at length share in his honour and his joy. Those who have been in the lowest circumstances here below, shall be received to glory; and though they had not where to lay their heads on earth, shall enjoy blissful mansions in their heavenly Father's house, and be received to everlasting habitations. Finally, my brethren, let us "be content with such things as we have." If we meet with reproach and censure, with hardships and persecutions; if we are driven from house and home, from friends and relations, or are even called to resist unto blood, let us be patient and faithful, and "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ;" remembering the encouragement the apostle giveth: "It is a faithful saying; if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him," 2 Tim. ii. 11.

DISCOURSE X.

THE BLESSING OF ZEBULUN AND ISSACHAR CONSIDERED.

DEUTERONOMY xxxiii. 18, 19.

And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain, there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand.

OF Moses it is said, that "the Lord knew him, and spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend." There was such a friendship between them, and Moses had such a regard to

the will of God, that when he commanded him to go up to mount Pisgah and die, Moses readily go up and dies. But he would die after the manner of his ancestors; and as he was both a king and a father to Israel, he would take a solemn farewell of them, as his subjects and his children, and pronounce a prophetic blessing upon them. My text is the blessing he pronounced upon Zebulun and Issachar, two of the tribes of Israel. And it agrees entirely with Jacob's blessing of them: "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon. Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between two burdens; and he saw that rest was good, and the land was pleasant." Both these blessings were remarkable predictions of the situation of those tribes, when they should be settled in the land of Canaan. And they were fulfilled above two hundred years after Jacob's time, when we are told, that Zebulun's border was fixed by lot, that it went toward the sea, and that Issachar's went quite to the river Jordan, Josh. xix. 10, 22. I apprehend this portion of scripture is capable of conveying some very useful instruction; and in discoursing from it, I shall consider,

I. The different circumstances and occupations in which men are placed. And,

II. The duties incumbent on them, as hinted at in the text.

I. *I am to make some reflections on the different circumstances and occupations in which men are placed.*

Zebulun was to rejoice in their going out, and Issachar in their tents. This naturally points out the two grand divisions in which men of business may be ranged; that is, tradesmen and farmers. The lot of Zebulun lay from the Mediterranean sea on the west, to the lake of Gennesareth on the east: and therefore it was said in Jacob's prophecy, that it should "be a haven for ships," Gen. xlix. 13; accordingly there were several fine ports in this lot. This tribe was chiefly employed in commerce; they were merchants and tradesmen. The lot of Issachar fell more in the inland part of the country, in a fruitful soil, adjoining to the river Jordan; and they "saw that rest was good," they were fond of a retired life; and "the land was pleasant," Gen. xlix. 15, and fertile; and so they devoted themselves principally to agriculture. Zebulun, on account of its situation, "sucked of the abundance of the sea," gained wealth by navigation and traffic; and Issachar enjoyed "the treasures hid in the sand." The earth yielded them a plentiful increase, especially the rich land near the river Jordan, to which there may probably be a particular reference. And when Jacob describes this tribe as "a strong ass couching under its burden," it may intimate their being patient and unwearied in country labours.

These are the two chief occupations in every nation, and more particularly in this.

Multitudes are employed in navigation and commerce; in going to sea, and travelling abroad, to export the products of our own country, and bring to us the products of other countries. By this, we above any other nation may be said to "suck the abundance of the seas." Others are employed in domestic traffic; in preparing and selling various manufactures; in going out to get orders, or buy in goods; in exchanging commodities with their neighbours, and selling some sorts, that they may furnish themselves and families with others. And those may be very naturally ranged under this head, who are employed in furnishing others with the necessaries and accommodations of life, with food, habitations, fuel, garments, and the like.

The other grand division of men is into farmers: those who, like Issachar, abide in their tents; are confined within a small sphere; who cultivate the ground, and raise corn of various kinds for the service of man and beast; and a breed of cattle and sheep, and feed them to be fit for the use of man. Thus they "suck of the treasures hid in the earth."

Now there is much of the wisdom and goodness of God to be observed in these different occupations in which men are engaged. They are each necessary and useful, for the good of the whole; and they mutually support and assist each other. The hand of Providence is to be acknowledged, in giving men their different capacities and inclinations; that all are not fond of trade, or of husbandry, and one branch of business greatly overstocked, and the other much neglected. It is owing to God's directing the inclinations of men, that some are fond of the country, and some of the town; that some love the noise and bustle of cities and sea-ports, the fatigue and hazard of navigation and travelling; while others prefer the retiredness and silence of the country. Some choose to dwell with Zebulun at the haven for ships; others with Issachar in the tents of the country, among the bleatings of the flocks. Nor is this different choice entirely owing to education and habit, since it is frequently seen that young people choose a different occupation from their fathers; and some are uneasy till they have changed that to which they were brought up. This diversity of inclination is to be acknowledged as the appointment and the influence of God, the great Lord and supreme sovereign of every community. Further, his hand is to be owned and adored in giving men ability and skill to pursue their several occupations; in giving them the use of their limbs and senses, health of body, and capacities of mind. From God, the art of navigation is derived; the skill in building and working ships. From him the instruments of trade and manufactures are derived. All arts are to be traced up to him, as the original inventor. Thus,

in scripture, the skill of those who built and furnished the tabernacle is ascribed to God, "Every wise-hearted man, in whom the Lord put wisdom and understanding, wrought for the service of the sanctuary," Exod. xxxvi. 1. This is more particularly asserted concerning husbandry, though it requires so much less skill and sagacity than many other occupations. When the farmer ploughs and harrows, and sows his fitches, wheat, barley, and rye, "his God instructs and teaches him." His different methods of threshing and sifting the several kinds of grain, "come forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working," Isa. xxviii. 23, &c.

Since then there are such different occupations in life, and men's inclinations to them, ability for them, and skill in managing them, come from God, his providence ought humbly and gratefully to be acknowledged and adored. It also follows, that there is impiety, as well as folly, in that liberty, which so many take, of throwing contempt on trade or husbandry, or any other lawful and useful occupation. There is no employment in life properly mean, which is of real service to mankind. One may justly apply to the body politic, what the apostle observeth concerning the natural body; that "God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it pleaseth him. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the foot, I have no need of thee. Nay, much more, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble and less honourable, are necessary," 1 Cor. xii. 15, &c. The merchant cannot say to the farmer, "I have no need of you;" nor the shopkeeper to the mechanic, "I have no need of you:" yea, those occupations, which we think to be less honourable, are needful, for they provide us the necessities of life, and, as Solomon observes, to the honour of husbandry, "The king himself is served by the field," Eccles. v. 9. Thus there are different occupations in life, and the hand of Providence is to be acknowledged and adored in disposing and directing mankind to choose and pursue them. Let us consider,

II. *The duties incumbent upon men, however different their occupations be.*

And here I shall confine myself to such thoughts as the text furnisheth us with. Zebulun and Issachar are called upon to "rejoice," to "offer the sacrifices of righteousness," and "call the people to the mountain." This suggests, that it is the duty of men in their several occupations to be content and cheerful with their lot; to make religion their chief business; and to do what they can to promote it in others. It is their duty,

1. To be content and cheerful with their lot and calling, whatever it may be. Some understand the word "rejoice" to intimate, that they should have cause of rejoicing; and in this

sense it will be true of every one that diligently and honestly follows his proper employment. It may also be considered as a direction to both these tribes to be content with the portion of land assigned them. It is the duty of men of business to accommodate themselves to it, to be well pleased with it, and rejoice in it; more particularly, to guard against an envious spirit; a discontented, fretful temper of mind. Let not Issachar be uneasy with the toil and dirt of the country, and envy the greater gain of the merchants of Zebulun. Let not Zebulun be uneasy with the noise and hurry of the city, and envy the tranquillity and pleasure of the country. Let not the farmer repine at his toil, nor the tradesman at his confinement. Let neither murmur at providence, nor censure the good intentions of their parents and friends, in disposing of them to such a particular business, on account of any fatigue, difficulty, or hazard, which may attend their situation and circumstances. Every calling hath its conveniences and inconveniences. A dislike to the business, to which a man hath been brought up, generally ariseth from pride, ignorance, or an inordinate love of wealth or ease: and if the discontented person were to have his wish, and change with the person he envies, in all probability he would repent it speedily, and wish he had continued as he was. "Vanity and vexation of spirit" are written upon all things under the sun. He that expects to pass through life without experiencing this, deceives himself. But prudence, diligence, and good economy will gradually lessen the difficulties of any employment; and piety and humility reconcile the mind to them. It is our duty to pursue the business of our several callings with activity and cheerfulness. We are to guard against that excessive application, hurry, and fatigue, on the one hand, which men of ambitious and covetous spirits impose upon themselves, so that they can have no real pleasure in the enjoyment of life. On the other hand, we are to guard against a trifling, indolent, extravagant disposition, by which men first lose their trade, and then complain of the deadness or unprofitableness of it. It is the wisdom and duty of young people to submit to the judgment of their parents and wise friends in the choice of an employment, provided it be lawful; and in whatever occupation they are placed, to be content. And it is the duty of all to guard against an uneasy, fretful spirit, on account of their station in life. And here I must remind you, that both Zebulun and Issachar are called upon to "rejoice." Solomon observes, "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place," Prov. xxvii. 8; that is, he exposeth himself to many temptations and inconveniences by leaving his station. I must also remind you, that God "fixeth the bounds of our habitations, and chooseth our inheritance for us;" and what the apostle saith to some who were slaves, the meanest and most disagreeable

situation we can conceive, is a rule of general force and benefit; "Let every man abide in the same calling, wherein he was called." "As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all the churches," 1 Cor. vii. 20, 24. Again, it is the duty of men in every occupation,

2. To make religion their chief business and greatest concern. To "rejoice," in scripture, frequently denotes religious joy; or a devout regard to, and confidence in God, which ought to proceed from a love to him and complacency in him, and to be attended with delight. Accordingly, in the New Testament, "joy" is described as one of the fruits of the Spirit; and "joy in the Holy Ghost," or a cheerful spirit, is one of those things in which the kingdom of God consisteth. It is the duty of men, in every occupation, to observe and acknowledge the hand of God in it, and in every circumstance which makes it comfortable; to "acknowledge him in all their ways;" "in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make their requests known to him;" to seek direction from him in the management of their affairs, and implore his blessing, as that which is necessary to make their labours successful. When he is pleased to prosper their handywork, it is their duty to be unfeignedly thankful; for as Solomon observes, "every man to whom God hath given riches and power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour, this is the gift of God," Eccl. v. 19.

But these several branches of duty are more evidently included in that phrase in the text, "There they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness." They, that is, the persons spoken of, Zebulun and Issachar: though some understand it of the people mentioned in the former clause, whom they should invite. But if they invited others to serve God, it cannot be supposed they would neglect his service themselves. It is the common duty of merchants, and tradesmen, and farmers, to "offer the sacrifices of righteousness," which means the sacrifices required of the Israelites by the law, which they were bound in justice to offer; or righteous sacrifices, offered with a sincere and faithful heart. This, in the sense of the New Testament, is to make religion their great business, and the service and glory of God the chief end and aim of their lives. They are to be careful and conscientious in an attendance on public worship, in "going to the mountain," to the house of God, and there "offering sacrifices," the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. It is no uncommon thing for merchants, tradesmen, and farmers, to excuse themselves from such an attention to religious concerns. They plead in such language as this: These things are well enough for those who have nothing else to do. They are not absolutely necessary; they are too much for men of business.

For my part I have no notion of being so very religious. I do not want to be one of the stricter sort. At least this appears to be the language of their hearts. But if any of you have so much business, and are so greatly hurried that you cannot mind religion, that you cannot find time to worship daily in your closets and families, to read the scriptures and converse with your own hearts, and must rob God of the whole, or part of his holy day; that excess of business is certainly sinful. Religion and diligence in business are undoubtedly reconcilable. But if any of you fancy that they are not, it is evident which is to be preferred; since (as Dr. Lucas observeth), "if the will of God were so, it is much better to be starved than damned." Those who pretend that they cannot find time for religion, can find time for pleasure, and spend more in unnecessary sleep, idle chat with their neighbours, or other amusements, than would be necessary for the acts of religious worship, secret and social. Where a person's disposition is serious and spiritual, and when his great aim is to please God and save his soul, there will be no difficulty at all to find time for religion. There is nothing wanting but the heart, a real love to that which is good. By the regular practice of religious worship, and a care to perform the works of your several callings, "after a godly sort," that is, with honest intentions, and a desire to please God and approve yourselves in his sight; by these means, I say, the business of both worlds may go on together. Let this then, my friends, be your care; your daily, your earnest concern. As Christians you "are a royal priesthood," to offer up the sacrifices of righteousness; and let it not be your guilt and your shame, that, to use our Lord's words, "one goeth to his farm, and another to his merchandise," Mat. xxii. 5; or, which is more criminal and shameful, one goeth to his pleasure, and another to his company, when the service of God demands his attendance. Let it be the care of the tradesman, that his merchandise may be "holiness to the Lord;" of the mechanic and labourer, that his hire may be "holiness to the Lord," Isa. xxiii. 18. Let it be the care of the farmer, that, according to the prophecy of Zechariah, there may be "upon the bells," or, as the word rather signifies, upon the bridles or gears "of his horses, holiness unto the Lord," Zech. xiv. 20.: that is, that every thing in your common occupations may be done in a religious manner; that serious, vital godliness may appear in all you do; and that God in all things may be glorified. Once more; it is the duty of men of every calling,

3. To endeavour to promote religion in others. Thus it is said in the text, "They," that is, both Zebulun and Issachar, "shall call the people to the mountain;" to the house of God, which Moses foresaw, by a spirit of prophecy, would be built upon a mountain. There was, indeed, one of the tribes of

Israel particularly set apart and devoted to the service of the sanctuary, viz., Levi; and of this tribe Moses saith (v. 10), "They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law." Their immediate business was to call the people to the mountain; yet it was not their business alone. The tribes spoken of in the text, though their employments were so different, were to unite in promoting the interests of religion. Thus, though Christ hath appointed pastors and teachers in his church, yet it is the duty of every one of his disciples to "do good to all men," as they "have opportunity," to "seek the things of Jesus Christ," and to "exhort one another daily." Let merchants and tradesmen then improve their commerce to spread the knowledge of God and religion, and to promote piety, justice, and charity. Let farmers improve their business and connexions with others, to the same good purpose. Let those of you, whose labours God hath prospered, "honour the Lord with your substance," and cheerfully concur in any good design for promoting the happiness of all around you, supplying the needy, and relieving the afflicted: and thus, according to that expression of the prophet, "consecrate your *gain* unto the Lord, and your *substance* unto the Lord of the whole earth," Micah iv. 13. But the great thing you are to be solicitous about is, to promote the salvation of one another's souls. There are few of you who are in trade, or have husbandry to manage, or even common domestic concerns, but have servants and dependents, as well as children, over whom you have some authority and influence, who will naturally pay some regard to what you say, and on whom your admonitions and instructions will be likely to have a good effect. Let me entreat you, then, to "call *them* to the mountain;" to urge upon them a regular and serious attendance upon public worship. For such an attendance, in its own nature, and by the promised blessing of God, will be likely to impress their hearts with a sense of religion, make them diligent and faithful in the duties of their stations, and at once a blessing to your families, and an honour to Christianity. God speaks of it to the praise of Abraham, that he would "command his children and household to keep the way of the Lord." Let it be your care to invite and encourage, and (where that will not do) to command your children and household, to sanctify God's sabbath, and to reverence his sanctuary. Set before them the reasonableness and usefulness of so doing, and let them see that you are in earnest, by frequenting the house of God yourselves: not setting them an example which you would not have them follow, nor employing them otherwise at the seasons of religious worship. You well know, it is the command of God that on the sabbath neither your "man-servant, nor maid-servant, nor cattle," should work, any more than yourselves. Cases of necessity and mercy

are always to be excepted : of these you must judge ; but judge as in the sight of God, and as accountable to him for the souls of your children and servants, if they perish through your neglect or default. Let this pious and commendable care extend also to your neighbours and intimates. Call them also "to the mountain;" exhort them to mind religion, and take care of their souls. And, it is probable, God will succeed your labours of love ; it is certain he will remember and reward them. These are the duties which our text naturally urgeth upon persons in business, whatever their particular occupations be ; that they should be content and cheerful in it ; make religion their chief business ; and endeavour to promote it in others.

I would not conclude without observing, that these are duties incumbent upon every one of us, as reasonable creatures, members of society, and especially as the professed disciples of Christ. These are the duties of those who are of the learned professions ; of those who can subsist without trade and labour ; of women, children, and servants ; for they are indeed the one thing needful. Each of you, my brethren, hath some business in life to do, which requires activity and cheerfulness in the dispatch of it. In every station in which you are, the gospel requires you to be content. It is your duty, it is mine, to make religion our main concern, and the salvation of our souls the grand object of our pursuit. It is your duty, as well as mine, to cultivate a public spirit, and to be generously concerned for the salvation of the souls of others, and zealously to promote it. You have every one of you some friends or acquaintance, with whom you can converse about divine things ; whom therefore you ought to endeavour to make wise and good, and build them up in knowledge and holiness. "Consider one another, then, to provoke unto love and to good works." And to excite you all to the discharge of the duties now recommended, I entreat you seriously to reflect on that weighty and encouraging declaration of the apostle Paul, with which I conclude, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. iv. 8.

DISCOURSE XI.

THE BLOOD OF SPRINKLING, SPEAKING BETTER THINGS THAN
THE BLOOD OF ABEL.

HEB. XII. 24.

*And to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than
that of Abel.*

“GOD forbid, that I should glory,” saith the apostle Paul, “save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.” Having felt the powerful influence of the death of Christ upon his own heart, he made it the object of his joy and boasting; and took all opportunities to recommend to others the same regards to it. He is in the context, as in many other places of this epistle, showing how much more excellent the privileges of Christians were, than those of the Jews, and setting them in a comparative light. In the list of Christian privileges, he mentions this, that we are come “to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” It is in the original, “than Abel;” so that interpreters are not agreed to what the apostle here refers: whether to the sacrifice he offered, and of which God declared his acceptance; or to his own blood, which his cruel brother had shed. Many suppose that it refers to his sacrifice, which was more excellent than that of Cain, and therefore God had respect to it. But Christ’s sacrifice is much more excellent than that. I understand it in the latter sense, as referring to his own blood; for there seems no particular reason, why the sacrifice of Abel should be mentioned, rather than the Jewish sacrifices in general; or the sacrifice of some particular person, as Samuel, Elijah, or Solomon, of which God declared his acceptance in a more extraordinary manner than he did his respect to Abel’s. This interpretation is illustrated and confirmed by what God saith to Cain, “The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground,” Gen. iv. 10, that is speaketh unto me for vengeance. So the martyrs are represented as crying to God to judge and avenge their blood, Rev. vi. 10. And on this interpretation the contrast of opposition between “the blood of sprinkling,” that is, the blood of Christ our sacrifice, and the blood of Abel, is more plain and striking. The latter spoke, or as it is said in the history, “cried,” with a strong repeated cry (as the word there used signifies), for vengeance on Cain, the murderer. But the blood of Christ speaketh better things; pleads for mercy in behalf of sinful men, yea, even of those that shed it. For the further illustration of this important subject, I shall,

I. Consider what the blood of Abel speaketh.

II. What better things the blood of Christ speaketh;—and

then apply the subject to practical purposes. Let us consider,

I. *What the blood of Abel speaketh.*

It cried to God for justice and vengeance against his brother Cain, who had cruelly shed it. The guilt of Cain in this horrid action was as great as we can well conceive. His conduct was unjust, unnatural, cruel, and impious to the highest degree. The law written upon his heart strongly forbade it. One would have thought, that the natural dread of shedding human blood, which man, even in his apostate state, feels, might have been sufficient to prevent his slaying any man, especially his brother. He knew death was the penalty of sin. He had seen beasts slain for sacrifice, and perceived what terror and pain they felt when dying; which should have increased his abhorrence of putting a brother to death. His guilt was greatly aggravated by the consideration, that there were then but few men upon earth, and it wanted to be peopled. If Abel had a family, the distress and misery in which they were involved by his death, made the guilt of his murderer more heinous. But the most aggravating circumstance of all was, that Cain hated and slew him because he was more righteous than himself, and God had shown more regard to his sacrifice than to Cain's. So that it was desperately flying in the face of the Almighty; and because he could not be revenged upon God, he would be revenged upon his brother. No wonder an act of such horrid and complicated guilt was most provoking to God; and that the blood thus cruelly shed, cried unto him. It cried unto him, as the author of life, and the righteous governor of the world, who ordereth and disposeth of the lives of his creatures. It cried to him for vengeance against a wretch who had broken the law of the creation, and usurped the prerogative of the Creator. It cried to him as a holy God, to whom the righteous sufferer was very dear, and in whose sight "the death of his saints is precious." Considering Abel's pious character, it is very probable that he poured out his dying breath in prayer for his cruel brother, that God would forgive him. But his blood cried for vengeance; that is, the circumstances of the case and the guilt of the murderer demanded a just retribution from the most High. So "the cry" of the sins of Sodom is said to "reach unto heaven;" and in many places of scripture the same phrase is used. Before I dismiss this head, I would observe, that this apostle saith that Abel, "being dead, yet speaketh," Heb. xi. 4. He not only testifies, that there is a future state, and a reward for the righteous in it, but he warns all persecutors and murderers, intimates how great their guilt is, and what a dreadful execution awaits them. If the blood of one righteous person cried for vengeance, how terrible will be their doom, who have "shed the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus in abundance!" How sad the case of the Romish church in particular, "in which," as St. John observes, "is found

the blood of prophets, and saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth," Rev. xviii. 24. The voice of so much blood crieth, and will be heard. And in the day when God comes to "make inquisition for blood," it will be the utter ruin of that cruel, persecuting church. Let us beware of this guilt ourselves. There is persecution of the tongue, cruel mockings and sneers of those who are more righteous than their persecutors. Dread the thought of having the blood of others crying against you. Remember there are other kinds of murder, which may perhaps be more painful to the sufferers than directly killing them; as the murder of their reputations, vexing their spirits, and destroying their health and comfort. It is better to murder a man at once, than do it by inches. There is a kind of murder which I fear many are guilty of; and that is, hating their brethren, or not loving them. "This," saith St. John, "is the message, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of the wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer," in disposition, and would slay him if he could do it safely. "And ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him," 1 John iii. 12—15. Beware therefore, my brethren, of heart-murder. Check the first risings of envy, resentment, and passion; for you know not to what desperate wickedness they may lead you. "Woe unto them that go in the way of Cain!" Jude 11. I proceed to consider,

II. *What better things the blood of Christ speaketh.*

That is undoubtedly meant by "the blood of sprinkling." So we read of "the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus," 1 Pet. i. 2. And it is so called in reference to the law of Moses, which directed the priests to sprinkle the blood of that sacrifice, which had been offered to make atonement for the sins of the people. So Moses sprinkled the blood on the people, as the blood of the covenant, or that blood which confirmed the covenant that the Lord had made with them. But what is most to our present purpose is that passage in the law, where, on the great day of atonement, to which the apostle so often refers in this epistle, the high priest was to go into the most holy place, with the blood of the sacrifices for himself and the people. There he was to "sprinkle it upon," and before, "the mercy-seat seven times, to make an atonement for his own sins and the sins of the congregation," Lev. xvi. 4. Blood, in the nature of it, can cleanse no other way than by "making atonement;" cleansing from sin and moral pollution. Thus the high priest procured pardon for the sins of Israel as a nation; and God promised, in consequence of this action, to forgive their sins against him, as their lord and king, and to continue his favour to them. Now

it is with reference to this appointment, that the blood of Christ is called "the blood of sprinkling;" that is, he died as a sacrifice for sin; and they who repent and believe in him are interested in the blessings obtained by his atonement and intercession. But on this important point I must be a little more particular. I would observe, then, that the blood of Christ speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, as it speaketh to God in behalf of penitent sinners, and speaketh encouragement to every penitent believing soul.

1. It speaketh to God in behalf of penitent sinners. Abel's blood cried to heaven for vengeance against Cain; but the blood of Christ pleadeth for mercy. His blood answereth the same end in kind as the Jewish sacrifices; taketh away the guilt of sin and confirms a covenant of mercy. Having once offered up himself without spot unto God, he is entered into heaven, as the high priest did into the most holy place, there "to appear in the presence of God for us." Christ, by dying for our sins, made an atonement,—repaired the honour of God's law, which we had broken; and God, having hereby shown his governing justice, and testified his displeasure against sin, raised his Son from the dead. He, as our high priest, is gone into heaven to sprinkle his blood, as it were, upon the mercy-seat or throne of grace; that is, to present it before the Father and plead the merit of it there for our acceptance. His very appearance there is pleading for us. There is a language in the action itself, in his standing before the throne. Besides this, he is said to "intercede for us;" which denotes something more than his appearance there; even praying or pleading for us; asking of the Father that pardon, peace, and assistance which we want, as guilty and feeble creatures. He acts for us there as our advocate, and the plea is the merit of his own blood. And what better things can this blood ask for us than these? I much dislike, and am even shocked at, the expressions of some divines on this subject; of "the blood of Christ being sprinkled on the burning throne and turning the wrath to grace;" of its "calming the frowning face of God;" "prevailing on him to lay by his thunder and fury." This is by no means a scriptural representation of the case, but directly contrary to the general tenor of the gospel. It is subversive of the leading design of Christ's death, which was to bring us to God, not to drive us *from* him. He was rich in mercy, disposed to show favour to sinners, before the blood of Christ was shed. His throne was "a throne of grace," a mercy-seat, before the blood was sprinkled upon it. "Fury was not in him," Isa. xxvii. 4. But in order to dispense his mercy in a way honourable to his government, and to preserve upon our minds a sense of his spotless holiness and utter abhorrence of sin, he appointed his Son to die, and to act as our intercessor. The mercy of God was the cause, not the effect, of Christ's death.

Just as he was disposed to show favour to Israel, and therefore appointed the high priest to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy-seat.

2. The blood of Christ speaketh encouragement to every true Christian. The blood of Abel not only cried to heaven for vengeance, but spake terror to Cain; followed him, as it were, wherever he went; filled his guilty conscience with horror and confusion, and made his punishment intolerable. But the blood of Christ speaketh encouragement and peace to every penitent, believing sinner. It shows that God is reconcilable, and willing to pardon the most aggravated offences. It gives us undoubted evidence that there is salvation for the chief of sinners. It seals the everlasting covenant of grace, by which we are assured that God will "be merciful to our unrighteousness and remember our iniquities no more." It proclaims peace to the awakened humble penitent. It gives us access to the holiest of all, to the heavenly world; and we can present our addresses to the throne of grace with comfortable hope of success. By this blood the assistances of the Spirit of God were obtained for us, and they are promised to us. By these our polluted souls may be sanctified, our dying graces revived; and we may have strong consolation under the afflictions and sorrows of life. "If the blood of bulls and goats, sprinkling the unclean, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Jesus purge our consciences from dead works," works which deserved death in the sight of our judge, "that we may serve the living God," Heb. ix. 13, 14. Such encouragement doth the blood of Christ speak to us! Such foundation doth it lay for our hopes of pardon, assistance, comfort, and eternal life!

This prevailing efficacy of the blood of Christ ariseth from his dignity and character, and its being shed by divine appointment. Consider the dignity of his person and the excellency of his character. His dignity, as the Son of God, and one with the Father, enhances his condescension in dying for us, and at the same time gives a high value and merit to his blood. Reflect likewise on his character. Abel's works were righteous, but not perfect. No doubt, as a son of fallen Adam, there were many defects in his character; yet God had a regard to the voice of his blood. How much more will he regard what the blood of Christ speaketh, "who was holy, harmless, and without spot!" He was the first favourite of heaven, and died "the just for the unjust." He was not, like Abel, incapable of resistance. He could have delivered himself from his murderers; but he voluntarily laid down his life for us. Therefore the Father loveth him, and heareth his pleading blood. Further, it was shed by divine appointment. Had it been only shed in the common course of things, as the blood of Abel or any other martyr, it would indeed have cried more loudly against the wicked Jews who shed it,

but have been of no avail to our redemption. But "it pleased the Lord to bruise him;" and God's "sword awakened against the man that was his fellow," that he might make atonement for sin. God "set him forth as a propitiation for our sins;" and therefore no doubt the voice of his blood will be heard. The efficacy of it extends to all penitent sinners. It "cleanseth from *all* sin." His atonement is as extensive as our iniquities; and the whole church of the redeemed are washed from their sins in" this precious "blood of the Lamb." I am now to apply the subject to practical purposes.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us rejoice that we are come to this blood of sprinkling.* The apostle represents this to the believing Hebrews in the text, as a singular privilege; in order to lessen their attachment to the law, and excite their thankfulness for the gospel. "We are not come to mount Sinai," with its terrors; nor to the Jewish temple and sacrifices, "which could never make the comers thereto perfect." We are not come to the blood of bullocks and goats, the sprinkling of which could only "purify the flesh," take away political offences, and cleanse ceremonial guilt; but it "did not pertain to the conscience," and free it from moral guilt and the condemnation of God, as the governor and judge of the world. But we are come to "the precious blood" of Jesus, which shows that God is propitious and will forgive penitent believers all their iniquities. And consider, Christians, how great a privilege this is. We know we are guilty before God and liable to condemnation; and when the conscience is awakened to see its guilt and danger, it is thrown into great and dreadful perplexity. An intolerable burden lieth upon it. And what must it do for relief? How must atonement be made to God and his injured law? What solid hope of pardon and acceptance can reason and nature, or even our own future obedience, give? The awakened sinner is then led by the Spirit to look unto Jesus, to view the ransom paid, and to accept and trust in the great propitiation. Then conscience is both pacified and purged. Here is our comfort, that though our sins cry for justice against us, the blood of Jesus Christ speaketh louder for remission and peace. What a blessed privilege is this! How thankfully should we adore the love of God to us, in giving his Son "a ransom for many!" Redeeming us at such an inestimable price! And with what gratitude should we ascribe "to him, that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

2. *What encouragement doth this afford to sinners to ask and hope for mercy through this blood, and seek their refuge in it.* What is there else, as I hinted above, that can give them hope? God hath pronounced a sentence of destruction on all the trans-

gressors of his law ; and “ every mouth must be stopped and all the world stand guilty before God.” Is not this the case of every one of you, Sirs ? And what will you do ? How do you hope to escape this destruction ? By what method is your guilt to be removed ? Not by a slight wish, or something like a prayer, “ God forgive me !” Not because you practise some duties, or resolve and promise to be better for the future. If you should be so, what is to make atonement for past offences ? Indeed before men are awakened to a penitent sense of their sins and God’s justice, they are very confident of his mercy, and hope for salvation through their own acts of obedience ; and, perhaps, they may add to it, for form’s sake, the merit of Christ. But when conscience is deeply convinced, when they see the number and aggravation of their sins, and the law and holiness of God armed against them, then they perceive the vanity of their former hopes, and the weakness of their confidence, and are ready to despair of mercy and help. I am to invite every awakened, humbled sinner to look unto Jesus ; to come to this “ fountain opened for sin and uncleanness ;” to fix their hopes on the merit and efficacy of his death ; to wash away their scarlet and crimson sins in the blood of the Lamb ; and to look to a wounded Saviour to have the deepest wounds of their souls healed by him. Hear, sinners, the kind, pleading voice of his blood ; pleading with God for mercy for you, and pleading with you to have mercy upon your own souls, and not despise this only remedy. To you salvation is offered ; salvation purchased and ensured by the blood of Jesus. Oh, earnestly seek an interest in it, and solemnly put yourselves under its protection, that you may be saved from destruction ; as the houses of the Israelites in Egypt were saved from the sword of the destroying angel, by having the blood of the passover sprinkled upon their doors. Attend to the exhortation of the apostle, in the words immediately following the text, “ See that ye refuse not him that speaketh ;” that speaketh to you by his word, and for you by his blood ; that speaketh such kind things in your behalf, and promiseth infinite and eternal blessings. If you despise this blood, you sin against the remedy, and are the murderers of your own souls. There is no other sacrifice for sin. You trample under foot the blood of the covenant ; you pierce Christ yourselves, Rev. i. 7, and are in effect his murderers. And you can conceive nothing more dreadful, than to have his blood crying against you. To have the blood of your own souls which you have murdered, and the blood of Christ which you have despised, both crying against you. The Lord pity your deplorable state, and awaken you immediately to fly to the only refuge !

3. *Let true Christians maintain a constant regard to this blood of sprinkling, and fix their dependence upon it.* The apostle ob-

serveth, that "God hath set forth his Son to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood," Rom. iii. 25. Observe that carefully. The apostle's meaning is plainly this, that faith in his blood is required of us, in order to our having the benefit of this propitiation; as he adds, that "God may be the justifier of them that believe in Jesus." Now this faith in his blood doth not merely signify a right persuasion concerning its value and efficacy; for that some of the worst of men may have; but, as the word faith (so far as it is a Christian grace or said to be saving) signifieth, a *trust* in it and dependence upon it; not only believing that the blood of Christ is sufficient to obtain forgiveness and to cleanse from sin, but actually relying upon it; depending upon his atonement; trusting to the merit of his death for pardon and salvation. And this is to be the habitual temper of a Christian, as well as the act of a penitent sinner at his first conversion. The merit of Christ's blood is to be applied to our souls and consciences, by the daily exercise of faith in it. Christians, labour to keep a due relish of, and regard to this truth upon your spirits. You will find it a preservative from sin. It will promote your humility and watchfulness. Would you successfully struggle with temptations and increase in holiness? Think much of this blood. Are you sensible of decays and declensions in religion? Remember your "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is the propitiation for your sins;" and renew the exercises of repentance and faith in his blood. The most kindly workings of repentance arise from a view of a bleeding Saviour. In all your approaches to God remember that you will not be welcome without this blood of sprinkling. This is the "new and living way by which alone you have boldness to enter into the holiest, even by the blood of Jesus," Heb. x. 19. Remember, your good works must be sprinkled with this blood, if you desire that they should be accepted of God. Observe what a union the apostle Peter establisheth between these; "Through sanctification of the Spirit to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," 1 Pet. i. 2. You will find this a noble support under afflictions. Doth the blood of Christ speak such and such good things for me; and shall I be impatient and complain of this or the other evil thing? Doth the world speak evil of me falsely? But what saith this blood for me? You perceive, I hope, the importance and advantage of faith in this blood. See then that you fix your dependence upon it, both living and dying. But nothing shows its importance more, or that a believing regard to the atonement and intercession of Christ is necessary, than this; that he hath appointed his supper to be a sensible sign and memorial of it; to keep up the remembrance of his death in the church, and direct the hearts of Christians to hope in it; even that "blood of the new covenant, which was shed for many for

the remission of sins," Matt. xxvi. 28. Do you hope to be saved by this blood, and yet neglect to commemorate it? May you not reasonably fear that it will cry against you for such a neglect? Let Christians draw near to that ordinance with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith in the efficacy of this sacrifice, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. And thus shall we be prepared to join "the spirits of just men made perfect;" who have all "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," Rev. vii. 14. Amen.

DISCOURSE XII.

CHRIST'S INCENSE PERFUMING THE PRAYERS OF ALL SAINTS.

REV. VIII. 3.

And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar, which was before the throne.

It is of very great importance, my brethren, that we have just and exalted ideas of the nature and design of religious worship; because it makes so large a part of our business as Christians, and hath so great an influence upon our temper and conversation. We should be often reminded of the necessity of it, and the manner in which it is to be presented; as we are too apt to forget these, or have but a light impression of them upon our minds. The scriptures therefore represent Christian worship to us in different lights, and under various images; in order more strongly to affect our minds and render our worship serious and devout in itself, acceptable to God, and edifying to our souls. It is represented to us under a beautiful, expressive image in our text.

Through most of the visions in this sacred book, there is an allusion kept up to the Jewish temple, its furniture, ministers, and service. Heaven, which was the scene of these visions, is described by figures taken from the temple. There the apostle saw "seven angels with seven trumpets, preparing themselves to sound." But before they sounded, we are told in the text, that "another angel came and stood at the altar, which was before the throne;" alluding to the golden altar of incense which was in the holy place of the Jewish temple, just before the veil, or entrance into the most holy place. This angel "had a golden censer," or chafing dish, which held live coals, on which incense was scattered and a fragrant smoke raised. "And to him was given much incense," or many rich and fragrant perfumes, "that he should offer it with the prayers of

all saints ; an allusion to the Jewish priests offering incense at the hour of prayer, as the mediators or intercessors of Israel. Thus we read that Zacharias the priest burnt incense in the temple, and "the whole multitude of the people were praying without," in the court of the temple, "at the time of incense," Luke i. 10. Our text is a visionary representation of Jesus Christ, our great high priest ; and beautifully shadows forth his intercession for his people. And the words suggest these three observations.

- I. All the saints are men of prayer.
- II. Their best services are very imperfect. And,
- III. It is the intercession of Christ that renders them acceptable to God.

I. *All the saints are devout and praying persons.*

This is plainly intimated in the text, where we read of the prayers of *all* saints. The people of God are called "saints ;" that is, as the word signifieth, *holy beings* ; because they are devoted to God ; sanctified by his Spirit and grace ; resemble him in his moral perfections of holiness, justice, truth, and goodness ; and because they are employed in his service. On these accounts angels are called "saints." "The Lord came from Sinai with ten thousand of *saints*," that is, angels, when he gave the law, Deut. xxxiii. 2, 3. Consequently a saint is the most honourable title in the world. Now the saints are all men of prayer. It is an essential part of their character as saints, to be so. It is a branch of their daily business to pray to God. The history of the saints shows this. Ever since God hath had a people in the world, they have been described as men that "called upon the name of the Lord ;" as "the generation of them that seek him." It is said that "every one that is godly seeketh the Lord." The time would fail me to mention the particular instances of good men recorded in scripture ; of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, and the prophets ; of our blessed Lord and his apostles, and all the first Christians. These are numbered among those that "called upon God's name." The lives of good men in later ages show this. They all practised devotion and recommended it to others. The saints esteem it highly reasonable in itself, that as dependent creatures they should own their dependence upon God ; that, as needy creatures, they should seek a supply of their wants from him ; that as sinful creatures they should implore his mercy ; and as weak creatures should beg grace to help in time of need. They esteem it fit, that, as creatures highly obliged to God, they should own their obligations and express and strengthen their gratitude to him. They esteem it unreasonable and unjust to withhold that reverence and homage which is due to God, as the greatest and best of beings. They know that God requires

their prayers ; that he commands men “to pray always and not faint ;” to “continue in prayer ;” to “pray every where ;” to “pray without ceasing.” They observe that “seeking God” is sometimes put for the whole of religion, as it is the foundation and support of it ; and that it is described in scripture as the character of the wicked, that they “forget God,” and “will not call upon him.” God hath made many gracious promises to those who perform this duty ; and denounced many awful threatenings against those who neglect it. The saints have received the Spirit of God, which is a “spirit of supplication.” He excites them to this duty, and fits them for it, by cherishing fervent desires in their hearts. They know that prayer is highly advantageous, as it keeps up a serious, reverent sense of God, of his presence and providence in the heart, and promotes a prevailing habitual regard to him ; as it teacheth us to regulate our desires, and preventeth our indulging any which we cannot with propriety and decency make known unto him. It strengthens that love to God, which is the first and great commandment ; gives peace and serenity to the mind ; and is the appointed means of obtaining the blessings we want. For these reasons all the saints are devout, praying people. Let us observe,

II. *There are many imperfections attending the prayers of the saints.*

This is implied in the text, where we read of “much incense” being offered with them. It is supposed they were sincere ; else they could not be the prayers of saints, nor would incense have been added to them. But the addition of the incense plainly intimates, that they were imperfect and polluted ; and, of themselves, unfit to be received by a pure and holy God. The justice of this remark is confirmed by observing, that though we have several accounts in this book of the worship of angels, yet we read nothing of their having any mediator, or any incense offered with their devout services. They are a higher order of saints. Their holiness and obedience are perfect, and their worship is in itself pure and acceptable to God. But the saints on earth are but sanctified in part. They do, as it were, pollute every sacred thing they touch ; and there is not only imperfection but sin in their best services. Though sometimes their thoughts are more fixed and their affections more devout and fervent in prayer, than at other times ; yet at all times, some trifles will break in upon their minds ; some vain, impertinent thoughts and distractions will intrude upon them and lead away their hearts from God. While he is near in their mouth, he is far from their reins : and their words and their hearts do not always correspond. Their devotions are sometimes hasty and formal ; without any, or with very little, serious sense of God, his greatness and glory, and knowledge of the heart. There is not that

life and ardour in their addresses which is proportioned to the importance of the blessings they ask for. Sometimes they neither feel, nor endeavour to feel, many of the 'good' things which they utter before an all-seeing God. When their thoughts are tolerably fixed, they often ask amiss. They ask earthly things too eagerly; spiritual blessings too coldly; and are apt to prescribe to God and limit the holy One of Israel, to grant such particular requests, or just in such a way, without a due submission to his will. In short, all the saints know this, and feel these imperfections. They confess and lament them before God. And if it were needful to convince any of them that this is the case, I would only desire them to suppose, that their prayers were written down, with every thought which occurred during the performance of them; and they would soon see, that thus they appear to the eye of God, and that every vain and foreign thought was an imperfection in them, and a pollution of them. They would readily own that there might often be as much evil in them to displease God, as good to recommend them to his favour. With pleasure therefore I add,

III. It is the intercession of Christ, which renders the prayers of saints acceptable to God.

Whether the angel here mentioned, who offered incense with the prayers of the saints, was, as I suppose, Christ himself, or an angel who had the honour to represent him on that occasion, the action is undoubtedly designed to lead our thoughts to his intercession. He had been described in the fifth chapter of this book, as appearing like a "lamb that had been slain;" which was a symbolical representation, or emblem, of his being the propitiation for our sins. Here he is described as offering incense; to represent the other part of his priestly office, acting as mediator and intercessor for the saints. And, indeed, his intercession is founded on his sacrifice. The Jewish high priest, on the great day of atonement, went into the most holy place to present the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy-seat, and took with him incense to offer there. This the apostle tells us in the Epistle to the Hebrews was a type of Christ, Heb. ix. 24, &c. The Jewish temple was a figure of heaven; into which Christ entered, after he had once offered himself a sacrifice; and there he "appears in the presence of God for us." There "he ever liveth to make intercession," Heb. vii. 25, to plead for us before God, and obtain those blessings for us, of which we stand in need. Therefore he is styled our "advocate with the Father," and the "one Mediator between God and man." His appearance before God is a virtual intercession; as the high priest's presenting the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy-seat, was, in effect, an intercession for Israel, though he had said nothing: and, indeed, no form of words was directed to be

used on that grand occasion. Hence the blood of Christ is said to “speak better things than the blood of Abel;” as there is a language in the action of presenting it. It is Christ’s constant intention to plead for his people, that his death may answer the purpose designed, and be considered by the Father as a sufficient atonement for their sins, and as having virtue and efficacy in it to render their services acceptable. Besides thus presenting his blood before God, he actually intercedes or prays to him in behalf of the saints; whether mentally or vocally the scripture doth not say. This is plain from the general idea of intercession, and from comparing another passage in this sacred book; there we read of the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders, as emblems of the Christian church, both ministers and people, “having every one of them golden vials or censers, full of odours, which are the prayers of saints,” Rev. v. 8.* These Christians prayed themselves; and Christ having the golden censer full of incense, intimates that he prayed likewise, offering his own prayers with theirs and for them. He seconds and enforces their petitions. He intercedes that those sinful defects which cleave to their prayers may be pardoned and excused, and their imperfect services accepted of God. These prayers of Christ are enforced by a just, proper, and effectual plea; even his own merit, his perfect righteousness and obedience, even unto death, which are so pleasing to God, that, on that account, he grants mercy to men. His intercession is founded on what he hath done and suffered: so that he hath a just claim to be heard, asking nothing but what he hath already purchased for his people; and God, by his promise and covenant, stands engaged to bestow. Now to this intercession of Christ it is owing, that the prayers of the saints are acceptable to God. Thus it is said, that “the Father heareth him always,” John xi. 42. Our Lord often tells his disciples, that what they ask in his name should be granted them. And this is described in the verse following the text: “The smoke of the incense ascended up with the prayers of the saints before God out of the angel’s hand,” that is, they were accepted by him. It may be necessary to add under this head, that the design of Christ’s intercession, represented by his offering incense, is not to remind God, as if he were forgetful, or to move and persuade him, as if he were unkind. But it is his own constitution and appointment; which shows his tender mercy and readiness to hear prayer: at the same time it reminds us of our guilt and unworthiness, and promotes in our hearts deep

* It is added, “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred,” &c., which seems plainly to prove that the four living creatures were not angels, or emblems of the angelic nature, as most commentators suppose; especially as they are particularly distinguished from the angels, who were present, and joined in some acts of worship. Compare v. 11, vii. 11.

humility and reverence; an habitual sense of the evil of sin and diligent care to avoid it. Therefore our obligations to the Father are not in the least diminished by this appointment; but his mercy and grace are apparent in the whole scheme of our redemption. Thus we learn from the text, that all the saints are devout and praying persons; that there are many imperfections attending their prayers; nevertheless the intercession of Christ renders them acceptable to God. I now proceed to point out to you the instruction which may be drawn from these particulars.

APPLICATION.

1. *They who do not make a serious business of prayer are not saints.* You see, my brethren, that it is the character of "the saints," yea, of *all* the saints, without one exception, that they are men of prayer. It hath been their character in every age and under every dispensation; so that I may address you, as Eliphaz doth Job, "Call now, if there be any that will answer thee, and to which of the saints wilt thou turn," but hath practised this duty? Job v. 1. One of the first signs of spiritual life beginning in dead souls, is serious prayer. So it was said of Saul the persecutor, "Behold, he prayeth." And it is the great support of the spiritual life. It is the character of the wicked, that they "cast off fear and restrain prayer before God." It is the character of the hypocrite, that "he will not always call upon God." He may do it now and then, to silence the clamour of his conscience, or to appear with some decency amongst men; but he will not do it *always*, will not make a daily business of it. Wicked people live "without God in the world;" forget their preserver and benefactor; and many of them entirely neglect prayer. Others of them generally neglect it, and do not regularly and seriously perform it. They omit it upon every trifling occasion, and perform it in a trifling, formal manner, without any reverent thoughts of God or earnest desires of his favour. While the abandoned sinners say, "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?" these more refined sinners say, "What profit shall we have if we pray to him?" Let me entreat you carefully to inquire, what is your character, and try yourselves by this mark? Are God and conscience witnesses, that you daily pray to your Father in secret? That morning and evening you present yourselves before him, to confess your sins, to entreat mercy and grace, and give him thanks for the blessings you enjoy? Inquire further, of what kind your prayers are. Whether they are a mere ceremony or a spiritual service. Whether they most resemble the common forms of compliment and civility which you use to your acquaintance, or your familiar, endearing converse with a beloved friend. Do you make your visits to the

throne of grace, not only to pay a homage which God requireth, but to seek an entertainment which you prefer to all others? Do you consider prayer as a task, a burden, and a disagreeable condition, without which mercy is not to be obtained? Or do you esteem it a great honour and favour to be admitted to approach to God, and think those the most delightful moments which are spent in communion with him? If prayer be not your daily, serious, solemn, delightful business, you certainly are not *saints*. You may indeed be gentlemen and ladies; you may be wealthy, learned, polite, and esteemed and admired by men; but assure yourselves you are not saints. A wicked man hath long treated this as a contemptuous title. Some of you may, perhaps, think lightly of it too; and may say, as I once heard a profane wretch say, when he was asked to join in family worship, "No, I'll be none of your saints." But, Sirs, if you are not saints, what are you then? You are sinners, vile, abominable sinners; odious to God, under his wrath and curse, and going down to everlasting ruin. You may not be much impressed with this now; but there is a day coming, when Christ shall descend from heaven with ten thousands of his holy angels, and make this proclamation, "Gather my saints together." Then shall he "come to be admired in his saints," and conduct them to heaven. And what will you think of saints then, when you see them "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and going to be for ever with him," and you, and all other prayerless creatures, punished with everlasting destruction from his presence? You will pray then, and pray sincerely and earnestly too; but it will be too late. Christ will not intercede for you, but condemn you. In short, if you are not saints on earth, you will never be saints in heaven. I pray God to convince you of your folly and madness; that you may "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near." We may infer,

2. *The intercession of Christ will not excuse the neglect of prayer, or the allowed defects of it.* As Christ's being a propitiation for our sins strengthens and doth not lessen our obligation to a holy life, so his intercession strengthens and doth not lessen our obligation to prayer. It is designed to excite and encourage our addresses. If any take occasion therefore from this appointment to neglect prayer, they pervert the gospel, make Christ "the minister of sin," and "turn the grace of God into licentiousness." Nor will his intercession excuse the allowed imperfections and defects of our prayers. Our duty is to strive against them; to labour after an habitual command of our thoughts; to enter upon prayer with serious consideration; to implore the help of the Spirit; to check our thoughts when they begin to wander, and to examine, after the exercise is finished, how it hath been performed; to be humbled for its

defects, and labour to serve God without prevailing distraction. Then may we cheerfully hope, that Christ's intercession will avail for our acceptance. Again,

3. *How glorious and how amiable doth Christ appear as an intercessor!* How honourable is the office with which he is invested! How great is his merit in God's esteem! and how dear is he to his Father, that the prayers of the saints will be accepted through his incense, but not without it! What a capacious mind must the Son of God have, that he doth not overlook or forget the prayers of any one saint, but knows the meaning even of those desires and groanings which cannot be uttered! How compassionate is his heart to regard them! How gracious doth Christ appear, that, amidst all the glory of his exalted state, the splendour of his Father's palace, and the homage paid him by saints and angels there, he regards all his people on earth; hears and presents all their prayers; never retires from the work of intercession, and is never weary of it. Blessed Jesus, should every saint say, I adore and love thee and rejoice in thee; and worthy art thou to receive everlasting glory and blessing! Further,

4. *What deep humility becometh the greatest saints.* When God intended to show Job's friends how much he resented their uncharitable treatment of him, and to lead them to humility and repentance, he commanded them, "Go to my servant Job, and he shall pray for you; for him will I accept, lest I deal with you after your folly," Job xlii. 7. With the same view are we commanded, to go to Jesus Christ. It shows us the odious nature of sin in God's sight, that, notwithstanding the infinite benignity and goodness of his nature, he will not allow a sinful creature to come near him, but by a Mediator; nor listen to the prayers of polluted lips, but as presented in his name and with regard to his intercession. This is a most wise and gracious appointment, as it illustrates the majesty and holiness of God, and in every address reminds us of the evil of sin and our own imperfections, since our best services need incense to perfume them. The pride of our hearts, which is not entirely mortified in the best, leads us to imagine, that we can come immediately to God, or bring something valuable of our own. We are ready to boast of our performances, and think God is indebted to us for them. But the intercession of Christ strikes at the door of this sin which easily besets us. It shows us that the greatest saints have reason to be humble, and that our best duties need forgiveness, instead of meriting reward. Are we at any time ready to trust to our own righteousness and plead the worth of our services? The iniquities of our holy things should be sufficient to destroy our confidence. Our prayers would bear witness against us, and in this sense, out of our own mouths should we be condemned. Let us often think of the matter in

this light, to cure our conceit of ourselves and promote our humility; for "when we have done all that is commanded, we are unprofitable servants," and are only "accepted in the Beloved." Which leads me to add,

5. *Let us fix our dependence on the intercession of Christ for the acceptance of our prayers.* Through Christ we have access to the Father. This is an encouragement to prayer, peculiar to the Christian dispensation. If we do not pay a believing regard to him as Mediator, we do not pray as Christians, nor shall we be heard. Let us then cherish in our hearts a deep sense of our need of a Mediator; an entire acceptance of Christ under that character; a cheerful dependence upon his grace; and a hearty compliance with his method of salvation. Let all our prayers be offered up in his name with a serious regard to his intercession. Let us often mention his name in our addresses, and have a respect to it, when we do not expressly mention it; pleading it with God, and committing our prayers to his hands to be perfumed with his incense. While our best services are so broken and imperfect that we may blush to present them; while a consciousness of guilt and pollution discourageth and is almost ready to terrify us, let us behold, by an eye of faith, Jesus standing before the throne, with his golden censer and much incense. And having such a high priest to intercede, a high priest who was once in our own nature, and is still touched with the feeling of our infirmities, let us, as the apostle exhorts, "come boldly to the throne of grace, and draw near with full assurance of faith," Heb. iv. 14, that our prayers will be heard; that we shall be guarded against the many dangers to which we are exposed, and grace and glory be given to us. But let me again remind you, brethren, that Christ will not plead in a bad cause. He offers up his incense with the prayers of his saints and theirs only. For "the prayers of the wicked are an abomination." But I would add, if there are any truly desirous to become saints; who are sincerely sorry for their past sins, and particularly their neglect of serious prayer; if they are willing to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and will now earnestly address the throne of grace, Christ will intercede for them, and perfume their first cries for mercy. For we are assured by the apostle, that "he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," Heb. vii. 25.

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE CHRISTIANS AND THE
WORLD.

JOHN XVII. 16.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

MY fellow-Christians, it is my honour and pleasure to address you by that name and title, and it is yours to wear it; but it will be my grief, and your reproach now, and your aggravated misery hereafter, if, while you name the name of Christ, you do not depart from iniquity and live in this world as your Lord and Master did. It is necessary therefore frequently to consider, what were the temper and conduct of Christ and of his holy apostles, and to view these in various lights, that we may be followers of them. We have one view of them in the text; and it will, by the blessing of God, be very useful in the present state of men and things about us, to attend to it. Christ is here recommending his disciples to the care and protection of his heavenly Father; and he asks this for them, because (ver. 14) “the world hated them;” for, says he, “they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Nevertheless I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” that is in it. And further to enforce his petition and fortify their minds, he repeats it again in the text; “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” By “the world” we are here to understand, not merely those who did not believe in him, but *all* wicked men in general; all that were not sincerely holy and good. And it contains an intimation that the generality of men were bad. The dispositions of Christ’s disciples were different from those of the world about them, whether Jews or gentiles. Hence we read of “the men of the world,” and “the children of the world,” as distinguished from the children of God and of light. And St. John saith, “We know that we are of God,” born of God, and do not practise sin, “and the whole world lieth in wickedness,” 1 John v. 19. This is true of all Christ’s sincere disciples now. They are not of the world, any more than their Master. His temper and behaviour were, and theirs are, widely different from the temper and behaviour of the generality of men. And if we take our view of things from scripture and observation compared together, we shall soon be convinced of this. My design is to show the difference between Christians, that is, true Christians, who are like Christ (for in that sense I now use the word), and the world, or generality of men. And here

I would observe, that their leading sentiments, rules of life, affections, and pursuits are very different and contrary.

I. *Their leading sentiments and views of things are very different.*

I speak not of the things of the world, of common objects, or good and evil in general; but things of the greatest importance, and those by which their characters are distinguished. The world is willingly and affectedly ignorant of the best things, and some of its wisest men only study them as a science, without having their hearts affected by them. Worldly men have some general notions of God and his providence, and that some reverence and worship is due to him. The Christian considers him as the God with whom he hath to do; as the life and happiness of his soul; as his hope and portion and exceeding joy; whose "loving kindness is better than life;" while others know not God, and are "without him in the world." It is no wonder that, in consequence of this, they have hardly any idea of the dignity of their souls, the proper use of their rational faculties, and the end of their creation; while the Christian sees and knows these, and at the same time considers himself as having once been in a sinful, polluted, condemned state, and needing, with all his dignity and glory, to be born again, or else he must have perished for ever. These sentiments of himself lead him to see that sin is an evil and bitter thing, the disgrace and ruin of the creation; while worldly men think it a very light matter, make nice distinctions between vices and crimes, and colour over some detestable practices with specious names. They call some vices in themselves, and others, which both reason and scripture condemn, only foibles; and think that God is too wise and good to condemn his creatures for them. Their sentiments of Christ are very different. Worldly men call him their Lord and Saviour; but they see no form nor comeliness in him, nor their need of an interest in him; while he is "precious" to the true Christian, and he esteems him, in his holy life as well as meritorious death, in his precepts as well as his promises, altogether lovely. They have different views of this world and another. They who are of the world seek it as the main thing, look upon it as their treasure, portion, and felicity, and upon those who have the largest share of it, as the most happy men; while the Christian despiseth it, looketh upon it as a dangerous enemy, and useth it only to promote his own gratitude and comfort, and the good of others. Worldly men have very low and carnal ideas of heaven. They talk of it as a fine place and a state of rest, but know little of its nature, work, and blessedness; while the Christian considers it as the perfection of knowledge, holiness, and love; a state of eternal nearness to God and friendship with him; and delights to view it as his home and inheritance. I observe,

II. *Their rules of life are very different.*

The world is in a great measure lawless. They "walk after the imagination of their hearts, and the sight of their eyes;" indulging all their fancies, and "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." They obey "the law in the members." Sin hath dominion over them, reigns in their bodies, and directs their actions. They, as the apostle expresseth it, "walk according to the course of this world," Eph. ii. 2, the vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers, and the fashions of the age in which they live. They consider not what is reasonable and fit, what Christianity requires, what is truly honourable and useful; but what others do; what the generality, especially the rich and the great, do; and would not upon any account differ from them. This leads many to be brutishly wicked, and run to every excess of riot; and it leads others to be genteelly wicked; only to allow themselves in the politer, and not the vulgar, vices of the age. They think that cannot be wrong which the many do, especially which the soberer part of the gentry do; and laying down this false principle, "they follow a multitude to do evil." If they have any regard to the gospel, it is only to keep up the external form of Christianity, and to be very zealous for some sentiments, rites, and ceremonies, which are no part of it; while they are led captive by the god of this world, obey him as his servants, and are influenced by that "spirit which worketh in the children of disobedience," the Christian, like his Master, makes the will of God the rule of his actions; this he studies; to this he conforms; to this he sacrifices every thing. He considers, not what is the way of the world, the custom and fashion; but what God commandeth, what Christ did, and what, as a Christian, he himself ought to do. He makes the word of God the rule of his devotion, his justice, his charity, and of his politeness too. He is born again, lives under the influence of that new nature which he hath received, and labours in all things to approve himself unto God. He hath the appetites and passions of others; but they are not his *rule*. His reason and conscience, as enlightened and sanctified by the word and Spirit of God, are his guide, and the example of Christ is his model. I observe further, that true Christians are not of this world, because,

III. *Their affections are very different.*

The spirit of the Christian, his principles, his affections, his motives of action, are in general contrary to those of the world. He hath the same natural affections as others; but they are sanctified, work in a different manner, and are strongest towards the best and most deserving objects. His prevailing love and hatred, his principal hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are quite different from those of worldly men. The latter have not

the love of God in their hearts. Some of them openly affront and blaspheme him. They condemn and reproach their Maker. They all hate God, are at enmity with him, and habitually forget him. What our Lord saith of the world in his time, is true of it now, that "they hate both him and his Father." Whereas the Christian loveth God with all his heart and soul; loveth Christ Jesus in sincerity, and delights to serve and please him. The Christian hateth sin as the greatest evil, and accounts those his enemies and the scandal of human nature who hate God. Worldly men hate and shun poverty, shame, reproach, sickness, and death, as the greatest evils; while they caress sin in their bosoms as a friend and a favourite. Carnal men are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;" they "love the praise of men more than the praise of God." A little popular applause elevates their vain minds. Again, they treat good and bad alike. They "bless the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth;" associate with the worst of men at their tables, in gay assemblies and parties of pleasure; and would reckon it a mark of rudeness to show any public slight to a rake or debauchee. But in the eyes of a Christian, "a vile person is contemned." He will shun the company of such, and have no conversation with them, when he can possibly help it; while he shows his concern for them, and love to them, by his earnest prayers for them, doing them any service he can, pitying their afflictions and rejoicing in their happiness. The Christian fears the name of God, while worldly men profane it or take it in vain. He dreads nothing so much as sin, and therefore "abstains from the appearance of it;" while worldly men make a jest of sin, readily venture upon temptations to it, and speak of the vices of others with a joke and a laugh. The desires and hopes of a Christian all centre in God, in his service, in converse with him in public and private, and in his favour; while the desire of others is towards the world, its gains and pleasures. They glory in their wealth and honour, their birth and outward accomplishments; while he glories only in God, and rejoiceth in Christ Jesus, and the hope of eternal life. His principal zeal is against sin, and for God, while they are zealously affected in that which is bad, and are ashamed to appear and act in a good cause. The Christian seeks and finds his chief pleasure in God; in reading, meditation, and prayer; in his closet and in the house of God; in denying himself, mortifying the flesh, improving his understanding and his graces; and in showing kindness and being useful to all men. The men of the world have no idea of pleasure in these things, but seek it in carnal gratifications, in getting money, making a figure in life, indulging their appetites, in a round of amusement; and this, while the consciousness of a rational immortal spirit within torments them. They say of religion and the sabbath, what the Christian saith of worldly

business and pleasure, "What a weariness is it!" and when will it be over, that I may be in my proper, delightful element? But I add, once more,

IV. *Their pursuits, chief aim, and ends are very different.*

This indeed I have touched upon already; for according to men's sentiments, rules, and affections, will their aim and pursuits be. Christ "always did the things which pleased" the Father. It was his "meat to do his will, to glorify him on earth, and finish the work he had given him to do." And this is the Christian's aim; while "they that are in the flesh cannot please God," but mind the flesh and earthly things. The Christian's business in life is to serve the Lord Christ; "this is the fruit of his labours;" to him "to live is Christ." Worldly men call this enthusiasm and folly, or are wholly devoted to a temporal interest. Their business is to "lay up treasures on earth," and to secure a portion in this life. They take more pains to gain the world and enjoy its pleasures; than, I fear, Christians do to "work out their own salvation" and do good to the souls of others; though that is their main business in life. The end of all the Christian's actions is to secure an immortal crown. He "sets his affections on things above," hath "his conversation in heaven," and by a patient continuance in well doing seeks it earnestly. Whereas they who are of the world mind the things of the world. Their chief concern is, "what they shall eat and drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed;" and how they shall enjoy, as they call it, the most of this short, precarious life. In a word, the one are sacrificing to the flesh, the other to the spirit; the one are laying hold on the world, the other "laying hold on everlasting life." So wide then is the difference, and so great the contrariety, between the men of the world, and Christ and his true disciples, who are not of the world;—between their sentiments, rules of life, affections, and pursuits. Let me now draw some useful inferences from this subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *The state of the world is very much to be lamented*; since it is so very different from the temper of Christ and his faithful servants. It is still true that "the world lieth in wickedness," and the generality walk in "the broad way that leadeth to destruction." It is lamentable that this should be the character of any of God's rational creatures, so different from what man was at first, so different from what man should be. It is peculiarly lamentable, that it should be the character of any Christians, who enjoy "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," have such a perfect rule and pattern of life in it, and such powerful motives to engage their conformity to them; that it should be the character of so many Christians, of the greater part of them; that

they are the reverse of the maxims of the gospel, "seeking their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ." What is yet more strange, they are easy and contented with this character, and often despise and insult those of a different character. Look round about you, my brethren, and see if this is not a just description of the world. And can we behold this and think of it without deep concern? Can we behold transgressors and not be grieved? If we ourselves were not too like the world, and sick of the same disease which will be fatal to them, we should more seriously lay it to heart and more deeply lament it.

2. *It is no wonder that the world hateth true Christians, since their temper and manners are so different.* That the world doth hate them, that there is great enmity in it to godliness and godly men, is very plain. They "called the master of the house Beelzebub." He was never one of the world's favourites; and no wonder his faithful followers are not. Their piety and steadiness bear witness against, reprove, and shame the world's corruption. They have often been persecuted and evil entreated for that conduct, for which they ought to have been valued and esteemed. They have had, and still have, "trials of cruel mockings." They are had in derision and laughed to scorn. Their infirmities and imprudences are aggravated into vices; while the notorious vices of the wicked are treated as foibles. Principles and practices are laid to their charge which they abhor. If the world cannot find any thing to censure in their conduct, they will judge their hearts. If they show unusual zeal in God's service and for the souls of others, they are reproached and bantered. They are charged with being stiff and rigid, sour and morose; and with depriving others of pleasures, for which themselves have no relish. The patrons of amusement and the men of gaiety are admired and caressed; while humble, pious souls are the song of the drunkard and the jest of the polite. And some who call themselves their friends, and the friends of religion too, will be so far from vindicating their character and espousing their cause, that they will join in the censure, though they do it in softer language. But it was so from the beginning. This is the old enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. It hath been maintained and shown in every succeeding age, and particularly against Christ. And by this thought he encourageth his disciples, and gives them the true key to the world's opposition. "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you," or "hated me your chief and master." Mark what follows; "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own;" if you will join with them, encourage them, at least not oppose them, in their sinful customs, they will love you, as persons of their own party and likeness; "but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world," to be preachers of

righteousness and examples to it, to enlighten and reform it, "therefore the world hateth you," John xv. 19. Again he saith, "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world," John xvii. 14. So that for a man to be hated of the world is so far, in general, from being a proof of his wickedness or folly, that it is really an evidence of his singular wisdom and goodness. If we experience less of this than our fathers, it is not, I fear, because the world is grown better, but we are grown worse. "Marvel not," my brethren, and be not discouraged, "if the world hate you," 1 John iii. 13; for you see how to account for it, and who hath endured the world's hatred before you. And though it may seem a strange, it is far from being an unkind wish, that the world hated you more.

3. *Here is a touchstone for our characters*; a test to try them by; a rule by which we may judge of our true state. Are we of the world or not? Is your conduct most like that of the generality or of the pious few? Consider in what degree, and in what respects, you resemble the multitude. Are your sentiments, rules of life, affections, and pursuits like those of the world, or those of Christ and his sincere followers? What do you think of the world, and what doth the world think and say of you? By this you may form some judgment of your real character. "They that are of the world, speak of the world, and the world heareth them," 1 John iv. 5, and is fond of them. So St. John describes some corrupt teachers; and no doubt they would plead, that they were baptized, were separated from the unbelieving world, and professed Christianity. But St. John plainly declares, that notwithstanding all this, while they were influenced by a worldly spirit and suited their doctrines and practices to the taste of a corrupt age, they were still "of the world." If there is no difference between you and the generality about you, but you engage in the same pleasures and manifest the same earthly spirit, and will give up a good conscience, or act against your better judgment, to please men, you must lie under the black character of belonging to the world, and have your portion with them. It is therefore highly necessary for us all to enter seriously and closely into this inquiry, whether we are of this world or not; since, as St. James observeth, "the fellowship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God," James iv. 4.

4. *See the danger of being conformed to the world.* This is a sin that easily besets us, but will end in ruin. It is a temptation especially dangerous to young persons. They are not suspicious of evil, nor experienced in the ways of the world and the wiles of Satan. Their social dispositions, their fear of shame and love of applause, too easily lead them into this snare. Think

then, my brethren, and especially my young friends, that "the way of the world" is a bad way; and how many soever walk in it, it leads to destruction. Be careful that you never make their practice your standard; that you never adopt their corrupt principles and maxims; nor think of levelling religion, as too many of its professors and I fear preachers do, with the humours and modes of the world. Be sure that their customs and usages are safe and innocent, before you venture upon them. And to know whether they are so or not, inquire, did Christ act thus? Would he have been seen in such a place, with such company, or at such diversions? Would he have been hindered from the temple, or his more private religious duty, by that, which I think a sufficient excuse for my neglect, because the generality think it so? And what though some who are called polite, sober, and charitable do, as you are inclined to do? Consider, they may be all this, and yet be destitute of the fear and love of God, and so be of the world. Ask not, What is the fashion? but, What is the gospel? for by *that* you are to be judged, and not by the customs of the age. The number of sinners will be no excuse for your conformity to them; no security against your future destruction. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Save yourselves therefore from this untoward generation. "Come out from among them and be separate, saith the Lord; touch not the unclean thing;" and "partake not of their sins, lest ye also partake of their plagues."

5. *How much need have Christians of resolution, watchfulness, and prayer.* We have need, brethren, of great resolution of mind, to stand firm in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; not to be carried away with the throng, but maintain our integrity. Yet this is not all. We are, like our Master, to testify our abhorrence of their wickedness, to appear on the Lord's side, and "rise up for him against the workers of iniquity." And this we are to do, though all men forsake us; and we have reason to say, that "men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree a lie," and that even our brethren deal deceitfully with us. We need much patience under reproaches and discouragements for well doing; and much courage, that we be in nothing terrified by our adversaries. We likewise need great prudence and caution, that we be not corrupted by the world, and that our love doth not wax cold, because iniquity abounds. We need these also, that "our good be not evil spoken of;" that by "walking in wisdom towards them that are without," we may give no unnecessary offence. In order to this firmness and prudence, we constantly need divine aids. Let us be fervently thankful to God, if he hath, by his grace, chosen us out of the world, and made us to differ from others. If we have been enabled to overcome the world, it is "because greater

is he that is in us," that is, the Spirit of God, "than he that is in the world," that is, Satan, the god of it, 1 John iv. 4. Let us earnestly pray for ourselves, while we rejoice that Christ is praying for us, that God would "keep us from the evil of the world;" that we be not ensnared by it; that our regard to religion and conscience be not in the least lessened by its corruptions; that we may be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Are we not of this world? so much the better. Let them despise us for it. But there is another world to which we belong; to which our tempers and manners bear a nearer resemblance. The painful scene will soon close. We shall quickly leave this wicked world; get beyond the enmity and the contempt of it; and our piety, zeal, and steadfastness will receive a glorious reward in that world "wherein dwelleth righteousness." For thus hath our Lord declared, to encourage his faithful servants in this world, "Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis," that wicked place, "which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4.

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE DANGER OF LOOKING BACK AFTER HAVING PUT THE
HAND TO THE PLOUGH.

LUKE IX. 61, 62.

And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee: but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

It is an important part of Christian friendship to point out to men the sources of those errors and that misconduct which may be destructive to their souls; and to warn them of the rocks, on which others have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. The principal of these are, not judging of things, and minding them, according to their real importance; and being too eager in the pursuit and enjoyment of things lawful and innocent in themselves. Against both these our Lord warns us in the text. A person who had heard his doctrine and seen his miracles, came to him, and, without being expressly commanded, said, "Lord, I will follow thee," I will become thy disciple and stated attendant; "but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house. Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back" (a proverbial expression for a careless, irresolute person) "is fit for the kingdom of God." He is not fit to be one of my disciples; I shall

not consider and own him as one of them; and he will have no title to the blessings of my gospel. Now these words suggest to us the following weighty truths;

I. Many seem disposed to follow Christ, and yet are kept back by their domestic and worldly affairs.

II. The concerns of religion are so very important, that they admit no excuse nor delay.

III. Those who have engaged in the service of Christ, must be resolute and persevere to the end.

I. Many seem disposed to follow Christ, yet are hindered by their domestic and worldly affairs.

To "follow" Christ is to become his sincere disciple, to obey his laws, to imitate his example, and to trust in his righteousness and grace. So that it is the character of Christians now, as well as those who attended him from place to place while he was upon earth. Thus he spoke of his disciples in general as his sheep, who "hear his voice and follow him." And, in the Revelation, true Christians are described as the "followers of the Lamb," whithersoever he goeth. The person in the text saith, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first bid farewell to my family." Had his meaning been, as our translation intimates, that he would only go and take leave of them, it is probable our Lord would not have opposed it. And in this case, his answer is not a positive prohibition, but a seasonable caution, that he should not suffer his friends to hinder the immediate execution of his good resolution. But the words may be better rendered to "set in order his household affairs." And this might take up a great deal of time, engage his thoughts, divert his attention, and our Lord might foresee, that by the variety of his cares, or the persuasion of his friends, he might be kept at home and never return to him. In whichever sense we take the words, and both may be included, they suggest this important truth; that domestic affairs are very apt to lead men to neglect religion, to defer it, or pay less regard to it than its importance requires. Many who have been awakened to a sense of their danger by reason of sin, and their duty to repent and return to God and mind religion, have been led to neglect these duties entirely, and to go on in their sin, by worldly concerns. They are so much taken up with their domestic affairs, that their serious impressions are worn out. They have no time to think closely of the importance and necessity of religion, and to try and prove what is acceptable to the Lord. They are so entangled with the business of this life, and the hurry of their trades and family affairs, that they cannot move towards God and heaven. Though they come to the house of God out of custom and decency, yet the word and prayer make no lasting impression upon their hearts, but "the cares of the world choke the good seed," so that it produceth no

fruit. They are such slaves to modes and forms and fashions, that they can scarcely entertain any serious thoughts about their souls and eternity. Others have some such thoughts, and are in effect saying, "Lord, I will follow thee." They seem resolved for God and religion; yet put off a close attention to these weighty matters. Their language is, "Let me first order my household;" let me be settled in the world; let me have despatched so much business, and have put my affairs into such a track and method, that I may have less encumbrance from them; let me get forward in the world, and attain such easy circumstances, that I may retire from business or lessen it; and then I shall have more leisure to think of religion. Many an awakened youth hath thought with himself, Let me be first free from a state of servitude and dependence, be fixed in a business and family of my own, and then I will follow Christ. Others postpone this great concern out of what they call civility and complaisance. They do not choose to differ from the custom of the times, to separate from some of their companions, or do any thing which would make them look singular, lest they should be laughed at and ridiculed: lest their attention to religion should be censured as idleness, enthusiasm, or vanity. Others, who go a step further than this, may begin to follow Christ, but soon stand still or make no considerable progress; because they consider their worldly concerns as the main thing, and religion as only a secondary thing; which is to be minded when nothing else interferes with it, and when they are at leisure from weightier concerns. They see others, and some who make a profession of religion, acting in this manner; and therefore think they may do so. They seem almost ashamed to have begun to follow Christ, and afraid to show any vigour and resolution in his service. They think it sufficient, that they have as much religion as the generality; which is indeed none at all, or next to none. These remarks sufficiently illustrate and confirm the first observation from the text, that many who seem disposed to follow Christ are hindered by their worldly affairs. I go on to observe,

II. *The concerns of religion are so very important that they admit no excuses nor delays.*

You see, in the text, that our Lord did not allow the excuse, which this person made for not following him immediately. Nor doth there appear any thing peculiar in his case. It must therefore be considered as containing a general intimation, that religion is to be minded in the first place; and that those who have entered upon it must not look back, nor be diverted from the prosecution of it by any thing else, especially not by worldly affairs. It may be proper to observe, that our Lord cannot be understood to mean that domestic affairs and worldly business are not to be minded. It is every man's duty to attend to these.

The Christian religion commands men to "do their own business; to work with their hands," to be diligent in their proper calling, to set their houses in order, and make a suitable provision for their families. It declareth that the man "who provideth not for his house, hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel, and that if a man will not labour, he should not eat." But worldly-business is no excuse for neglecting religion entirely, or deferring an attention to it, or trifling in its momentous concerns; and that for these reasons :—religion is the most important concern; religion and business may go on together; and business will flourish the better, if religion be minded, and minded too as the principal thing.

1. Religion is the most important concern, infinitely more so than any domestic and worldly concern. And therefore if they could not subsist and proceed together, religion should have the first place in our thoughts and pursuits. God demands our supreme fear, love, and obedience. The care of the soul is the one thing needful. To "fear God and keep his commandments" is "the whole duty of man." Nothing is of equal importance. Men have different callings and occupations in life; but every man's calling and occupation is to be wise and good, and "labour for the meat that endureth to everlasting life." This is too plain and evident to admit of a doubt in any reasonable creature, who believeth the immortality of his soul and a future state of rewards and punishments. A man need not consult with flesh and blood about it. Or if he doth there are none, except fools and madmen, but will tell him that "wisdom is the principal thing," and that it is his highest duty and interest "with all his gettings to get understanding." Further,

2. Worldly business is no excuse for neglecting religion, because both may go on together, if a man will "guide his affairs with discretion." He that acteth in his domestic concerns from right principles, and with good ends, is serving God and minding religion, while he is employed about them.* And every wise and prudent person may find sufficient time for those exercises, which are more properly religious, as reading, meditation, and prayer. If he cannot, his weight and multiplicity of business is sinful; his love of money is predominant above the love of God; and with all his diligence and anxiety, he will be condemned as a slothful servant. A person who is desirous to follow Christ now, hath in general

* "I exercise myself in the very business of my calling, as an act of duty and obedience to thee; acting in it those virtues of Christianity that might be honourable to thy name, of good example to others, of improvement of grace unto myself; using in it diligence without anxiety, dependence upon thee without presumption, contentment, patience, thankfulness, uprightness, plain-dealing, liberality; and by their means translated my secular employment into an exercise of Christian duty; serving thee, whilst I served myself, and converting that very employment and the time spent therein, to the use and honour of my Lord and Master, the good example of others, and the increase of my spiritual as well as temporal advantage."—Sir Matthew Hale.

no occasion to bid farewell to his family and friends. He is only required to forsake vain, mischievous companions, who are his real enemies.

3. To this I add,—that business and domestic affairs will flourish the better, if religion be minded as the principal thing. The fear of God, and a due attention to religious exercises, will promote prudence, diligence, frugality, humility, condescension, and affability. These virtues have an evident tendency to increase a man's substance. And by these he will secure "the blessing of God," which "maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it." Without this blessing, "it is vain to rise up early and sit up late." If men, as is sometimes seen, prosper without possessing these virtues, I believe it will generally be found that they put on the appearance of them. Or if not, that very prosperity is a snare to them, and will at length utterly destroy them. This is our Lord's command, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things," meaning all necessities, "shall be added unto you," Matt. vi. 33. But whenever it happens that business and religion come in competition, then religion is to have the preference: for it is absolutely necessary; it is the only way to true honour, wealth, pleasure, and happiness. And "what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" As these reasons show that religion is not to be neglected on account of domestic concerns, so they likewise prove that an attention to it is not to be deferred. To which may be added, that if men would observe what passeth in the world about them, they would soon see that the pretence of deferring it, in order to have more leisure for it hereafter, is vain and trifling. For the contrary will be the case. Their connexions in life, their avocations, and consequently their cares and anxieties, will increase; and they may then have less ability of body and mind to follow Christ, than they now have. The love of money may strengthen in their hearts, till it cannot be rooted out. Other bad habits may be contracted, which cannot be cured. Their relish for devotion may be quite gone, and they can think of nothing but the world. Religion is a sacred art and science, which is to be learned like others in youth; and so it will become natural, easy, and pleasant, and mingle itself with all our other concerns. But it is an unanswerable argument against delays, that our "time is short," and death may come upon us unawares. It is therefore the greatest wisdom to lay up treasure in heaven. He who is convinced of the truth and the obligation of religion, and yet puts off an attention to it, time after time, is not worthy of the pleasure and benefit of it, and will be likely to lose all its future rewards. These reasons show that the great affairs of religion admit no excuses nor delays; for religion is the one thing needful; it is perfectly consistent with a wise application to worldly

business; yea the prosperity of our secular affairs will be promoted by a diligent attention to religion. I proceed to the last observation from the text.

III. *They who have engaged in the service of Christ must be resolute, and persevere to the end.*

“No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” If a person who hath made a solemn profession of the gospel and given himself up to the Lord, looks back, or (as the word is) looks back to that which he hath left behind, turns to his former sins and wicked company, and loseth his seriousness and zeal, he will forfeit all title to the kingdom of God. If a ploughman is tired of his work, complains that it is difficult and dirty, and lays it aside, he is but a sorry labourer, and can have no hope of harvest. The disciples of Christ are not to leave his work and withdraw from it. For they can have no substantial reasons for leaving it. They can never discover any unreasonableness in his laws, nor have any ground to hope for satisfaction and real lasting advantage in the ways of sin. They can find no better service than that of Christ; and when they are tempted to forsake him, their answer should be, “To whom should we go but unto him? he hath the words of eternal life.” They must not be discouraged by any difficulties which they may meet with, but arm themselves with a courageous mind. Though there will be many temptations to draw them aside, yet none of these things should move them; else they will lose all their hopes, and be punished as backsliders and apostates. Further, the text intimates that they are not to neglect his work, nor go on carelessly in it. If a ploughman looks behind him, if he turns his head to gaze at his companions, to look at the flowers that grow in his path or the birds that fly around him, he will make baulks, and crooked furrows; his ground will not be turned up to a proper depth, nor lie in a regular manner. He must look straight on and keep his eyes and mind intent upon what he is about. Thus must the Christian act; and be careful that he be not diverted from his work by worldly business, and so cumbered about many things as to forget the one thing needful. He must not be fond of the pleasures of this life, as they will waste his time and lessen his relish for divine pleasures. He must guard against an excess of civility and compliance with fashion, lest it make him ashamed of Christ and his words in the midst of a wicked generation. The Christian’s work is most important, pleasant, and honourable. It requires and deserves most diligent application and self-denial; much more than any worldly business whatsoever. If men once begin to trifle with religious concerns, they will soon lose all the seriousness and ardour of their spirits; and some little omissions will “increase

unto more ungodliness." They will be unfit for the kingdom of God; unfit for the duties of religion; unworthy of its pleasures; and unfit for the work and blessedness of God's heavenly kingdom. Besides, it is a treacherous violation of their promises and vows. In short, this is indispensably required of us, in order to our acceptance and salvation, that "forgetting what is behind," and not looking back to the way we have left, "we press on to that which is before, endure to the end, and be faithful unto death." If we do not "continue patient in well doing," but grow weary of it, we shall lose the future harvest and come short of the kingdom of God. These then are the important truths suggested in the text:—that many, who seem disposed to follow Christ, are kept back by worldly and domestic affairs; that religious concerns are of such vast importance, that they admit no excuses nor delays; and that they who have engaged in the service of Christ must be resolute, and persevere to the end. Let me now add some useful reflections from this subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *How lamentable is the conduct of mankind in general; so widely different from the maxims of our Lord and Master.* The man in our text is an emblem of multitudes who say, "Lord, I will follow thee," but let me first do this thing or the other. Our Lord silenced this man's idle excuse at once. But men are every day repeating it, and endeavouring to satisfy their consciences with this, that they are to mind their business and take care of their families. Yea, they reckon it folly and weakness to make any scruple about pursuing their domestic concerns, while they neglect religion or omit its institutions. The world commends them for their conduct, as doing well for themselves, though they forget eternity. Thus they trifle in the most important concern, are double-minded and unstable in all their ways. "Business is to be minded," they say. And who denies it? But is not religion a business of some moment? Doth not the care of the soul deserve some serious thought; at least as much as the world? And would you be content to have your portion in this life and be miserable for ever? "Civility and complaisance are to be maintained." And who denies that? But must I comply with sinful, dangerous customs? Must I compliment myself into hell and destroy my soul, in order to be polite? Sooner let all the world brand me as a clown and a churl. "One must be friendly and sociable." So I would have you. But cannot men be so, without being wicked? Must I wound my conscience, displease God, and dishonour religion, by drinking to excess, keeping bad company, and spending my time in gaming and sports, merely for company's sake? Must I sin against God, by omitting religious services, merely that I may go out with my friends or bid them farewell? You see plainly,

that our Lord doth not allow any of these excuses. He doth not admit these *buts* and exceptions; and it is astonishing how any one who professeth religion can make them. What pity is it that men should trifle in the most serious matters, and defer a business of infinite importance! Thus lamentably do men deceive their own souls; contenting themselves with pleas which they know will not be admitted at the bar of Christ, and thus go down to destruction with "a lie in their right hands." And therefore,

2. *What great need have we to watch over ourselves, lest domestic affairs hinder us in religion.* How many melancholy instances have we every day, of persons acting over this man's folly, and suffering earthly engagements and possessions to destroy their souls! "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Be deeply convinced of the great moment and absolute necessity of being truly and steadily religious. Let young persons be engaged immediately to follow Christ, who kindly invites them. You can never find a better time to enter upon his service; for you have fewer cares and avocations than you will ever have; and he is most worthy to have the prime of your days and the vigour of your affections. If you do not devote the beginning and best of your days to God, you may be unfit at the end of life to be admitted into his kingdom. Let heads of families and men of business be very watchful, that they do not love the world and "turn aside from following the Lord." Apply your minds closely to religion, and stir up yourselves to the greatest activity and resolution in this most weighty business. Attend diligently upon the means of grace. For the more your cares and hurries are, the greater need you have to embrace every opportunity of calling off your thoughts from the world, and strengthening religious impressions. Keep your spirits intent and active, otherwise you will look back. Domestic affairs insensibly draw off the thoughts from God and divine things, without the utmost care. And this they more easily do, because diligence and activity in worldly business are every man's duty and highly commendable. Yet those who are most eminent for them, are prone to have their hearts taken off from better things thereby. Often think of the dreadful consequence of losing the life and power of religion for the sake of the world. What a poor equivalent will hundreds and thousands be for a starving soul, a troubled conscience, and everlasting torments! Let not civility and complaisance be carried to an extreme; and lay it down as an invariable rule, never to compliment any one at the expense of your conscience, peace, and improvement in religion. Earnestly pray, that by divine grace you may be preserved from the snares of business and domestic cares, and the more dangerous snares of company, entertainments, and diversions; remember-

ing, that your great business in life is to follow Christ, and become meet for the kingdom of God; and your noblest pleasure, to be conscious that you are active in his service, and to have good hope, through grace, of inheriting that kingdom.

3. *Let us be solicitous to persevere to the end.* Let me address all who have taken upon them a public solemn profession of religion, especially my young friends. You have "put your hands to the plough," and must not "look back." You have opened your mouths to the Lord and you cannot go back. Be not discouraged by the difficulties you may meet with. Greater is he that is with you than all they that are against you. Though ploughing may sometimes be dirty, disagreeable work, yet it is the work your master assigns you. You "plough in hope," and your harvest will be sure and glorious. "Be not therefore weary in well doing, for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not." With purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord. Go forth, and go on, in his strength; looking to Jesus, considering what labours and sorrows he endured, and he will make his grace sufficient for you. When you are tempted to desert religion, "remember Lot's wife," Luke xvii. 32. It is our Lord's own exhortation. She had left wicked Sodom; but she "looked back" with a hankering mind after the possessions and relations which she had left behind; and she was instantly struck dead, and turned into a pillar of salt. An awful monument of God's displeasure against backsliders in heart! For she *only* looked back. Keep the kingdom of God continually in your eye. Consider whether it is not worth pursuing, with the hazard of losing, yea, with the actual loss, of every earthly good. If the devil could give you all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, what would you be the better? But if you are made meet for "the kingdom which God hath prepared for them that love him," you are happy, eternally happy. I conclude, therefore, with that exhortation of the apostle Peter; "Wherefore, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. For so ye shall never fall, but an entrance shall be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. i. 10.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE SINFULNESS OF THOSE ACTIONS, OF THE LAWFULNESS OF WHICH WE DOUBT.

ROMANS XIV. 23.

Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

To “suffer sin upon our neighbour, and not to rebuke him,” is, in the judgment of the divine law, to “hate him in our hearts,” Lev. xix. 17. If he sinneth ignorantly, it is our duty to inform him; if knowingly, to rebuke him; and this is the best proof of true friendship and a rational love. The Searcher of hearts knoweth that I at all times address you, brethren, from a sincere and fervent concern for your happiness; and never more so, than when I judge it necessary to reprove and rebuke as well as exhort. My design in this discourse is to explain to you that important maxim which the apostle layeth down in the text, and urge your attention to it and remembrance of it at all times; as what will be likely to preserve you from many of the temptations of life, and to increase your holiness and happiness.

As in the apostolic age there were some contentions between the Jewish and gentile converts, about the lawfulness of eating particular kinds of food, St. Paul is, in this chapter, endeavouring to heal these contentions, and to promote a peaceful and charitable spirit, and a tender regard to the comfort and edification of one another. In order to this he lays down some general rules and maxims, which are of great importance and of universal obligation. He gives this reason why they should not censure one another, or impose their own sentiments and practices upon their brethren; namely, that though the thing in question was either doubtful or indifferent, yet to do it contrary to a man's own judgment was wrong. “He that doubteth,” saith he, that is, maketh a difference between the several kinds of food, from a principle of conscience and duty to God, “is damned if he eat,” that is, condemned of his own conscience, and exposed to the judgment of God; “because he eateth not of faith,” that is, with a firm persuasion of the lawfulness of so doing. And then he adds his reason for that sentiment, and lays down a general maxim in the text, that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” I intend,

I. To explain and illustrate this maxim, and

II. To add some practical reflections.

I. *To explain and illustrate the apostle's maxim in the text.*

The word “faith” in this connexion plainly signifies, a persuasion of the lawfulness of any action. He that performeth an action without such a persuasion, it is sin; it is offensive to God,

and exposeth the offender to his condemnation. There are many practices which are universally allowed to be lawful, and approved as commendable; many, which every one sees and owns to be wrong and unlawful. The difference of actions is so plain in general, and so naturally and easily perceived by all mankind, that there are very few instances in which the lawfulness or unlawfulness of an action will admit a doubt. All the open violations of the moral law, the neglect of the most important duties we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves, every one condemns. But there are some cases in which it may be doubtful whether *particular* actions are lawful or otherwise; and in such cases the person who acts contrary to his apprehension or suspicion, is guilty of sin. These two remarks will sufficiently illustrate the maxim in the text.

1. There may be some practices, about the lawfulness of which there may be room to doubt. Concerning which, some, who are sincerely desirous to know and do their duty, may not be able clearly and absolutely to determine whether they are right or wrong. This was the case with regard to the question considered in this chapter; whether such particular food might be lawfully eaten, or whether it were the duty of Christians to abstain from it. This doubt sometimes ariseth from the nature of the things themselves. There may be some lesser matters of the law, concerning which it may be hard for an honest mind to determine, how far they are at particular times to be observed. It may be difficult to fix a just and determinate boundary in some allowable indulgences, and to say when they are moderate and when they are excessive. This doubt may also arise from some particular circumstances; a variety of which may occur, as in the case here stated. A person might lawfully eat any wholesome kind of food, by the allowance of the gospel; but it might be doubtful how far he should use that liberty, where either Jews or gentiles might be prejudiced against Christianity, or a fellow-Christian be ensnared by it. It was impossible that the law of God should extend to every minute case, which might be supposed to occur, and sometimes doth occur; and which may create a suspicion in the heart of a Christian of the lawfulness of what he is inclined to do or to enjoy. Sometimes this doubt may arise from ignorance and a want of better information. A person may scruple the lawfulness of some actions or gratifications, which a little more reflection or further information may convince him to be allowable. Sometimes this doubt may arise from observing the behaviour and conduct of others; especially those of whose integrity and prudence he may have a good opinion. He may imagine an action or indulgence wrong in itself; yet may be led to question it, when he sees those, for whom he hath an esteem, making no scruple of it. This is generally the case with young people; they are too ready to

form themselves upon the model of others, without duly attending to the dictates of conscience and the authority of scripture. I observe,

2. Whenever this is the case, a compliance is sinful. He that acteth contrary to his own apprehension, or even suspicion, of the unlawfulness of any indulgence in question, is guilty in the sight of God. Whatever a man doth, which he is not fully persuaded to be lawful, to him it is *sin*; though to another, who is fully persuaded of the lawfulness of it, it may be no sin. I am speaking, you will remember, of indifferent actions, or such as may appear doubtful. But this can never be the case with regard to the great essential duties of religion. Unless we are verily persuaded that what we are doing is good in itself, and acceptable to God, our conduct is sinful. The apostle observeth (v. 14) that "there is nothing," that is, no kind of food, "unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth any thing unclean, to him it so." And again (v. 20), "All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence," so as to ensnare his Christian brother, and lead him into sin. If we have only a doubt or suspicion about the lawfulness of any action, it is our duty immediately to forbear it. And if we persist, while that doubt and suspicion remain, we contract guilt in the sight of God, and expose ourselves to his displeasure and condemnation. This will appear more evident and striking, if we consider that it shows a contempt of the divine authority and favour; light thoughts of the evil of sin; great want of self-denial and resolution; and it tends to lead us into further and greater irregularities.

(1.) To do what we doubt the lawfulness of, shows a contempt of the divine authority and favour. It is acting contrary to the dictates of reason and revelation, both of which are the law of God. Reason shows, that the authority of conscience ought to have great weight with us. It was a favourite maxim among the heathen moralists, and what they often inculcated, "Never perform a doubtful action." To do so is likewise contrary to the express law of the gospel, to the apostle's maxims in this chapter, and to that excellent rule, "Abstain from all *appearance* of evil," 1 Thess. v. 22. Christianity is a divine institution, and was intended to raise us to the highest eminence in religion; to make us as pure and holy as possible; and in order to that it is our duty to abhor and shun whatever has the appearance of sin. As the favour of God is inseparably annexed to the observance of his laws, the violation of them shows a contempt of his favour. To do what we doubt the lawfulness of proves that our hearts are not so entirely God's as they should be. It shows a want of care to purify ourselves from sensual and selfish affections. It shows that we do not propose the glory of God and the securing his friendship as the great end of life,

which we ought to do. Had we a daily and ardent concern to please God and approve ourselves to him, it would prevent the least hesitation in such cases as these. We should then consider nothing more, than what would best answer the ends of religion, and secure our own happiness, and we should never venture on what we suspect to be wrong.

(2.) This conduct shows, that we have light thoughts of the evil of sin, and are not sufficiently sensible what a mischievous and bitter thing it is. It is the character of an upright man, that he "fears God and flees from evil," Job i. 2. He considers sin as the abominable thing which God hateth; which hath occasioned all the calamities and mischief that have been and are in the world; and therefore he will keep at the remotest distance from it. To make free with temptations to sin, to venture on that which may be evil, shows that the mind is not duly impressed with a sense of the malignity of sin, or a becoming dread of that uneasiness, remorse, and anguish, which a reflection upon a sinful conduct produceth; and which is indeed the hell of hell, the chief torment in that place of torment. It is therefore to be feared, that those who act without a full persuasion of the lawfulness of what they do, have never been truly humble and penitent; but though they may abstain from grosser sins and keep up the forms of religion, are nevertheless "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."

(3.) This conduct shows great want of self-denial and resolution, and some prevailing bad principle or motive of action. "If any man," saith Christ, "will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up the cross." Let him continually oppose every sinful inclination and desire, deny himself what he knows or fears to be wrong, and submit to any hardship and suffering, rather than displease God and injure his own soul. A resolute Christian, one determined at all adventures to glorify God and secure his final salvation, will have very little difficulty how to act in the case we are considering. He will never venture on what he hath the least doubt of the lawfulness of. Nay, though he is ever so sure of its lawfulness, if he apprehends that it is not expedient, he will resolutely abstain from it. To act against a man's faith in such cases shows an unsteady mind; a double, a wavering heart; a heart which yet halts between God and the world, and is not "brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." It shows there is some bad disposition prevalent in the mind, which the person in question hath not self-denial and resolution to correct or act contrary to it. He appears to love his money, or his sensual pleasure, or vain companions, better than Christ and his soul. It shows he is more influenced by sinful shame, and the fear of man, than the fear of God and a regard to conscience and duty. It shows that he is more afraid of being ashamed before men, than being condemned of God; that

he chooseth to follow the fashion and be conformed to the world, rather than serve Christ, and be approved of him. It is from such bad principles and dispositions as these, that men are led to this compliance. And it is sinful to be influenced by such considerations and motives, where duty and everlasting happiness are concerned.

(4.) This conduct tends to lead men into further and greater irregularities. It hath been an old and it is a just remark, that no man becomes very wicked on a sudden. The devil is too artful and experienced a deceiver to propose to a person, who hath any sense of religion, a temptation to some gross and heinous crime. His great design and most dangerous engine is, to weaken a regard to conscience and duty, and lead men to trifle with these, and act in some smaller instances against the judgment of their own minds, or while they are in doubt of the lawfulness of what he proposeth. When he hath gained this end, the transition is easy to act against the deliberate judgment of conscience and the express declarations of scripture. From acting without a full persuasion, men are led to palliate their sins; at length they come to approve them; the judgment is biassed and prejudiced, till habitual practice hath seared the conscience, and they "commit iniquity with greediness." From indulging themselves in some things, the lawfulness of which may be at least questioned, they go on from bad to worse; till they run without consideration to all excesses of riot, and at length are "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." As what is perhaps lawful in itself may lead to sin, and stupify and enslave the conscience, in that connexion it becomes sinful; and it is the duty of every Christian to abstain from it, and keep himself pure. Thus have I endeavoured to illustrate the important maxim in the text, and represented to you the evil and danger of doing that, concerning the lawfulness of which we doubt; as it shows a contempt of the divine authority and favour; that we have light thoughts of sin; want self-denial and resolution; and as it tends to lead us to further and greater irregularities. I am now

II. *To add some practical reflections.*

1. How aggravated is their guilt, who run on in wilful, presumptuous sin! Doing that which they assuredly know, and sometimes confess, to be wrong. This is sinning "with a high hand," as scripture expresseth it, Numb. xv. 30, and is the most notorious affront to the God of heaven. There are many who know their duty, yet live in perpetual violation of the divine laws, continually combat with the dictates of their own consciences, and promise themselves peace, though they go on in the imagination of their own evil hearts, and wilfully pervert their own ways. But "the anger of the Lord will smoke,"

Deut. xxix. 20, against such persons, and of all sinners their future punishment will be most dreadful. For "who ever hardened himself against God, and prospered?"

2. What hath been said should teach us a tender regard to others, that we do not lead them into sin. This is the apostle's inference in the words after the text, "We then that are strong," who rightly understand Christian liberty, "ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." It should be our care to avoid all impositions upon the consciences of others, and not to lead them into sin by our authority, our persuasion, or our example. If they scruple to eat any particular meat, as things strangled or blood, for instance, as many Christians do; to eat it, while they have this scruple, is sin in them; and it is sin in us to urge them to it, how well soever we may be satisfied of the lawfulness of it. They are rather to be commended than blamed for abstaining, while such is their persuasion. If a person scruples the lawfulness of any particular form of worship, any particular indulgence or recreation, and the like; to censure such a person as of a narrow spirit, as too scrupulous and precise, is contrary to Christian charity, and may be attended with mischievous consequences. Let us endeavour in such cases to enlighten their understandings, to open their minds, and thus remove their scruples; but never urge them to act contrary to them while they remain. We should be careful also that our example doth not lead others into sin, and bring them to do what they suspect to be wrong, because they see us doing it. Many in the higher ranks of life occasion great mischief this way; and none more than some of those who make a profession of religion and in general behave as becometh the gospel. Their example, in complying with some fashions, and allowing themselves in some gratifications, which are dangerous, leads others to do what they have been taught and believe to be wrong; and so weakens the principles of conscience and a good education. Let us be cautious therefore, as the apostle exhorts, "that we do not put a stumbling-block, or occasion to fall, in our brother's way; but diligently follow the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." Let us deny ourselves for the good of others; "for even Christ pleased not himself," but died to save souls. Let us therefore be careful not to destroy them.

3. In all doubtful and suspicious cases it is the wisdom and duty of a Christian to keep on the safe side; to preserve a tender conscience, and resolutely avoid that which he doubts the lawfulness or expediency of. This is an important direction, naturally arising from what hath been said. It is of general use; extending to a variety of circumstances and occurrences in life, where more particular directions cannot be given. And the illustration of it by some instances may be the best means to enforce it. Do you doubt, for instance, (to return to the case

proposed in this chapter) whether any particular kind of food be lawful? It is your duty to abstain from it. Do you apprehend that such a particular kind of food, or such a quantity of it, will injure your health or unfit you for the business of life? It is your duty to abstain. Are you at any time in cheerful company, and apprehend that another glass or two more than you have taken, will hurt your understanding, or flutter your spirits? It is sinful to touch it. Do you suspect that prolonging a visit to a friend will take up that time which ought to be otherwise and better employed? It is then high time to go; and a sincere Christian will at once break from the company, however rude and ill-mannered he may be reckoned for so doing. The maxim in the text is applicable to many circumstances which occur in trade and dealing. Doth a person suspect that it is wrong to put off bad or light money; to sell damaged goods; to darken his shop, that his goods may appear more valuable than they really are? Doth he suspect that it is wrong to sell a commodity which may be, and is generally, abused to the purposes of vice; that it is wrong, for instance, to sell a man more strong liquor, after he begins to be, or is in danger of being disordered; to sell a profane, obscene book or ballad? An upright conscientious Christian will avoid those things, and rather lessen his trade, and his profit, than incur guilt before God. If a person suspects that any method of trade is not quite honest or honourable; that it looks like knavery, or is unreasonably severe and hard upon a customer, or a brother tradesman; that it would be acting contrary to the golden rule of "doing as he would be done by;" this very suspicion is reason enough to make him forbear. Again, if servants apprehend that the neglect of their proper business, trifling away their master's time, or embezzling or giving away his property, though it be but of small value, is wrong; as they evidently do, by their endeavours to conceal such a conduct; then it is certainly sinful. Again, it may be doubted whether gaming be lawful, especially when sums of money are played for; some believing it to be innocent, others a great sin. Yet when one sees how much persons' passions are excited by it; how much time is consumed by it; how much extravagance, sin, and mischief, it occasions to most who engage in it; what bad consequences it produces to men's estates, and families, and souls; and how much more rational and innocent recreations they might find; I say, whoever considers these things, cannot, I think, but be in doubt about the lawfulness of it. Now (as Archbishop Sharpe expresseth it) "to a man that loves God and hath a tender sense of his duty, this is enough, in all conscience, to deter him for ever from the practice of gaming, though he doth not think it in all circumstances unlawful, and doth not find it expressly and explicitly forbidden by any of the laws of Christ." Again, it may be doubted whether frequenting the

play-house, the assembly-room, and some other public diversions, is lawful or not. Yet I think a person must never reflect at all, or be extremely stupid, who hath no suspicion and doubt upon this head. It is evident that Christianity requires us to avoid, as much as possible, the society of persons of bad characters ; that it represents the love of pleasure as spiritual death ; that such diversions occasion irregular hours, and disorderly families ; hinder or unfit for family and closet devotion ; that they give the mind a wrong turn, indispose it for serious thoughts and reflection ; that persons of the worst characters are most fond of these amusements, and countenanced in their vices by the better sort, who associate with them ; that the wisest and best men in all ages have generally condemned them. Who then, that thinks at all, but must doubt of the lawfulness, at least expediency, of such diversions ? And in such cases it is the wisdom and duty of every Christian to keep on the safe side, that he may not fall into sin and condemnation. I shall only add another instance. I think there are none, who have had a good education or read their bibles with any care, but must have their doubts, whether visiting, frequenting public-houses, and unnecessary travelling, on the Lord's-day, be not sinful. And if so, it is their duty to abstain, to turn away their feet from what they suspect to be evil, and to keep out of harm's way. In short, I must beg leave once more to repeat it, a doubt or suspicion whether a thing be lawful or no, is reason enough to make us forbear it, if we desire to approve ourselves to God and our own consciences. I am very sensible that this doctrine, though it be evidently that of the apostle, is very unfashionable, and not likely to go down with the lukewarm Christians of the present day, especially the younger sort. They think it will require much self-denial, and that they shall be reckoned unpolite and unfashionable for acting agreeably to it. I am very sorry that any should esteem these to be objections of any weight, where duty and happiness are concerned ; that they should "love the praise of men more than the praise of God," and think it much to deny themselves, when everlasting life is promised. Abstaining from such practices, of the lawfulness of which you doubt, will expose you to no unreasonable difficulty. It will require no self-denial, but what will be consistent with the truest and noblest pleasure ; make your consciences calm and easy ; secure the approbation of the wisest and best men, and the loving-kindness of God, which is better than life. This is so far from making you slaves, that it is improving and increasing the true liberty of a rational, immortal creature : a freedom from the slavery of appetite, passion, and custom. It will secure the regular exercise of his faculties, the delightful approbation of his conscience, and the cheerful hope of glory, honour, and immortality. Let me beseech you therefore, brethren, to consider

this matter carefully; seriously to weigh the apostle's determination in the text, and to make it the rule of your conduct. A due regard to this short, plain maxim would have the most happy influence on your lives, to keep them pure, regular, and holy; it will give you more exquisite pleasure than you can possibly enjoy in the gains of this world, the gratification of any craving appetite, or the indulgence of any fashionable recreation. I see not how persons can be otherwise than uneasy, who do what they suspect to be wrong; and the greater advantages they have enjoyed for religion, and the more solemn profession of it they have taken upon them, the greater uneasiness they must feel. On the contrary, as the apostle observes in the words before the text, "happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth;" that is, it is a great happiness to be easy in what one doeth, and to be free from the reproaches and suspicions of conscience. It is a happy thing to use lawful enjoyments in a lawful and regular manner, and to abstain from all those things which we know or suspect to be evil. I conclude the discourse with those forcible words of the apostle John: "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things." If we are conscious that we have acted, or continue to act, against our apprehension or suspicion of evil, God sees and knows it; yea, beholds a thousand follies which we have never observed or have forgotten, and a thousand aggravations which it is impossible for us fully to estimate. "But, beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God, and whatsoever we ask we receive of him; because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight," 1 John iii. 20—22.

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE MADNESS OF SINNERS.

LUKE XV. 17.

And when he came to himself.

It is related in the life of Colonel Gardiner, that, after his remarkable conversion from a course of irreligion and debauchery to the fear and love of God, and a conduct agreeable to the gospel, it was reported among his gay companions, that he was stark mad; a report at which none who know the wisdom of the world in these matters will be surprised. He therefore took the first opportunity of meeting a number of them together; and after having defended a righteous, sober, and godly life, and challenged them to prove that a life of irreligion and sensuality was preferable to it, one of the company cut short the debate, and said, "Come, let us call another cause: we thought this man mad, and he is in good earnest proving

that we are so." Perhaps there are few among the irreligious and licentious part of mankind who would make so frank a confession; yet if we take our notions of things from the dictates of unprejudiced reason and the word of God, we shall be sensible that this sentiment is true; that religious men are the only persons in their right minds, and that all the rest are in a state of miserable distraction. This sentiment is suggested to us in the text; where it is said concerning the prodigal son, that "he came to himself;" which intimates that before he was beside himself. This truth I shall now endeavour to illustrate and improve; and it comprehends these two thoughts, that every unconverted sinner is a madman or beside himself; and that when a sinner repents and returns to God, he comes to himself and to his right mind.

I. *Every unconverted sinner is a madman, or beside himself.*

A human creature, who hath lost his understanding and is distracted, is a lively emblem of an ungodly, wicked man. And here let us attend a little to the character of the person spoken of in the text; and we shall find it an exact picture of the gay world in the present day. He was a young man, and being, like too many young people, very proud and conceited of his own wisdom and abilities, he desires his father to give him his fortune; having a mind to set up for himself and be a man at once. Quickly after he had received it he leaves his father's house. Being impatient of control, weary of the good order, and averse to the wholesome restraints of his father's family, and yet not being quite lost to all shame, he did not choose to stay at or near home, but rambles abroad, and there "wasted his substance with riotous living." He was a great lover of pleasure; fond of amusement and diversions; and, therefore, with the most prodigious extravagance, he squandered away what he had, to furnish out his pleasures and keep pace with the companions of his riot. At length this thoughtless, extravagant youth was reduced to want and beggary. All this while, the text intimates, he was beside himself; quite out of his senses; while he thought himself a wise and a polite man; laughed at the gravity of the old gentleman his father; and ridiculed the sobriety, diligence, and dutifulness of his elder brother. So unhappy and miserable is the case of every impenitent sinner, though his vices may not be the same; though he may not so profusely waste his substance, or run to the same excess of riot! And this will appear if we consider—that a wicked man doth not use his understanding as he ought, but acts contrary to the nature of things, his own professed judgment and true interest, and is averse to the methods of cure.

He doth not use his understanding as he ought. He is not himself, that is, what a man should be, what is expected from

human nature. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." He is made "wiser than the beasts of the earth, and hath more knowledge than the fowls of heaven." God hath implanted in the human soul a capacity of discerning good and evil; of judging what is right and fit to be done, and what to be avoided; together with a principle of conscience, or a power of comparing our actions with the divine law, approving or condemning them: that men may see, and feel too, what will be the consequence of such and such particular actions and dispositions; that they may not, like the brutes, follow every impulse from within, and rush headlong to the gratification of any appetite which solicits them. Now a wicked man doth not use these faculties for the purposes for which they were given; doth not use them to inquire what is true, and good, and useful, and therefore fit to be pursued; nor examine into the consequences and effects of any particular conduct. He "walks in the way of his heart and the sight of his eyes;" he follows, wherever fancy or passion, custom and fashion, lead, without thought and without reflection. He employs his mind about trifles, fills his memory with pernicious or unprofitable ideas, and takes no care to cultivate that reason which is the distinguishing glory of the human frame. He is not what he seems to be, a rational, thoughtful, reflecting creature.

Further, he acts contrary to the nature of things, his own professed judgment and true interest. Solomon observes, that "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live," Eccl. ix. 3. "Madness in general," as one observes, "means such an extravagant deviation from the common apprehensions and actions of men, as discovers either the want or total disorder of some of the principal faculties which men daily exercise in common life. Now vice is the same deviation from the established constitution of nature, and the same violation of its laws, as madness is of the ordinary practice of mankind." As in a natural lunacy, there are oftentimes intervals in which the unhappy creature is himself, and seems for a time well, so it is in this moral disorder. Sinners are sometimes under strong convictions of the misery of their state; are sensible of the necessity and excellency of true religion, and accuse and condemn themselves for neglecting it; and for a while they act rationally, but soon return to folly. The distraction appears again; they grow worse than before, and forget their wise acknowledgments and good resolutions. The sinner overlooks the rank, dignity, and immortality of his soul; is intent upon "making provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts," and acts as if he were to die like a beast. He seldom or never inquires, "Where is God my Maker?" but forgets, affronts, and provokes that Being, in

whom he lives and moves, and from whom he derives every blessing and comfort; just as madmen, without distinction, neglect, disoblige, and provoke their best friends and benefactors. He makes a foolish and absurd choice. He prefers wealth and splendour, pleasure and gay company, to the favour of God, the peace of his own conscience, the joys of religion, and the happiness of heaven; just as a madman prefers dirt or tinsel to gold, and a pebble to a diamond. He employs his faculties, consumes his health, his time, and his vigour, in pursuing wealth and sensual pleasure; while he speaks contemptibly of the sublime joys, and solid, lasting advantages of true religion. All his carnal delights put a force upon reason and conscience, and are no better than the dreams and fancies of a distracted man. He seems pleased with his own unhappy condition; sports with the chain of iniquity in which he is held, and, by repeating his follies, he furnisheth his conscience with fresh accusations, or sears and hardens it, till it becomes almost insensible. With the madman described in the gospel, he "casts himself into the fire and the water," exposeth himself to innumerable hazards; or, like another mentioned there, he "wounds and cuts himself," despiseth everlasting happiness, selleth his soul for the gain of this world, and parts with the eternal joys of heaven for the "pleasures of sin, which are but for a season." Thus he goeth on amusing himself, while he is the object of the pity and contempt of all wise and good beings. He sees some of his companions perishing by their own folly and extravagance, and ruining themselves for both worlds; but he takes no warning; deceives himself with delusive hopes, that he shall come off better than they. He is also mischievous to others; violating their chastity, property, or reputation, and seducing them to sin and ruin. And is such a man as this in his senses, who is as great a stranger to benevolence and humanity as to piety and righteousness? No, "as a madman who casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour and saith, Am I not in sport?" Prov. xxvi. 18. Once more,

He is averse to the proper methods of cure. Distraction is the worst disease to which we are liable, because madmen are their own enemies and unwilling to be healed. They often return ill language and abusive behaviour, for the most kind and friendly attempts to restore their understandings. Herein also sinners are like them. There is nothing they hate more than thought and consideration. They take pains, by a round of business or pleasure, to drive them out. Serious useful books are their aversion. Public worship they forsake; or, if some sense of decency brings them to it, their hearts are not engaged; and converse with God and their own consciences in secret is neglected. They despise the proposals of the gospel,

and slight the remedy of the great Physician of souls. "Some of them reject the gospel, though they never deigned to give it an hour's hearing, and satisfy themselves with an oath or a jest, and with saying boldly and at random, that ' 'tis all a cheat.' Such is the vain security and stupid indolence of many sinners, of whom some act against conscience, and others have no conscience to act against. In whatever point of view you place their conduct, its folly is apparent. And, therefore, whatever honourable titles they may boast of; whatsoever high rank and station they may hold in civil society; whatsoever airs of importance they may give themselves; whatsoever scorn they may affect for the sober, the serious, and the honest; whatever wit they may have at command; whatsoever learning they may possess, though usually they have not much of that; they are at the bottom persons *void of understanding*. Though they are not confined to dark rooms, like some other unhappy persons, but are permitted to walk up and down, and to shine in the politest circles, yet is their frenzy not at all the less real, and is infinitely more mischievous to the world."* In short, the whole life of sinners is one continued scene of frenzy and folly. In many cases of lunacy, persons will speak and act rationally, except upon one particular subject. So it is here. Though with regard to the concerns of this world and his temporal interest he may act wisely and rationally; yet to that which is "the one thing needful," "the whole of man," and the main concern of an immortal being, he pays little attention. But there is this difference, and it shows the prodigious folly and madness of sinners, that their distraction is voluntary; they bring it upon themselves; they choose it, and love to have it so. Such is the deceitfulness of sin, that when once a man hath devoted himself to it, he generally persists in it against the clearest dictates of conscience, and will call it happiness, though he feels it to be misery; whereas a natural madness is a calamity, not a crime; and the unhappy persons who are affected with it deserve our tenderest sympathy. I observe,

II. *When a sinner repents and returns unto God, he comes to himself.*

So the prodigal in the text. His necessities brought him to himself. He thought and considered, resolved and returned to his father. And his father received him "safe and sound," as it is expressed (v. 27). In the original it is only one word, and signifies restored to his health, or to a sound understanding. The first good symptom in the case of a sinner, is thinking and considering. It gives favourable hope that the madness is removing, when men are sensible that they have been disordered.

* Jortin's Sermons, vol. iii. s. 19, p. 387.

The convinced sinner thinks on his ways, argues the case with himself, is, like the prodigal, sensible of his miscarriage in sinning against heaven, and his own folly in forsaking the ways of religion and happiness. He not only sees, but pursues, his true interest. He begins to be sensible of the worth of his soul and the importance of his eternal concerns,—to have just apprehensions of God and his duty. He hath, as the apostle observes, “his senses exercised to discern both good and evil,” Heb. v. 14. He sees the evil of sin, and now detests those vile refinements, luxurious arts, and sensual gratifications, which before he called politeness. He awakens from his dream of pleasure, shuns the company with which he before associated, and is ashamed to think that he should have been so long intoxicated and enslaved by sin and vanity. He now sees the value of Christ, as the physician of souls; applies to his salutary remedies; puts himself into his able, faithful, and tender hands, to have all his mental disorders cured, and his heart renewed in the image of God. And he is careful to comply with his prescriptions; gives himself to reading, meditation, and prayer; regularly and seriously attends public worship; and guards against every thing that might occasion a relapse, disorder his understanding again, and pervert him from the ways of God. In this view he walks humbly and watchfully; ponders the path of his feet; is thankful for the admonition of his friends, and determined “with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord.” Now he appears to be in his senses; and the change is as remarkable, great, and wonderful, as for an idiot or a madman to become a judicious, serious, amiable, and useful creature. He now “shows himself a man,” acts up to the dignity of his rational nature, because he acts upon religious principles. He becomes an honour to human nature, an ornament to religion, and a blessing to mankind. Well may it be said of such a one, as of the converted prodigal, “He was dead, but is alive again; he was lost, but is found.” Let me now add some useful reflections from this subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *What numbers of distracted people are there in the world.* If forgetfulness of God and religion, a neglect of consideration, watchfulness, and prayer, and a disregard for scripture; if pride, luxury, and licentiousness, are symptoms of distraction, alas! almost all the world is mad. It is a kind of Bedlam; for, as the apostle John observeth, “it lieth in wickedness.” The god of this world blindeth men’s eyes; he bewitcheth them, and works and rules in all the children of disobedience. How few are there to be seen of a sound mind; who are perfectly themselves; who think and act as rational, accountable creatures! How many men of the greatest sagacity and penetration, who get large estates and fine fortunes, are yet out of

their senses ! I fear most in the higher ranks of life are quite beside themselves ; and their madness was perhaps never so raging, desperate, and inveterate, as in the present day. The play-house, the gaming-house, the assembly-room, the card-table, are almost entirely filled with such unhappy persons, who, to use the prophet Jeremiah's language, are "mad upon their idols," Jer. l. 38. They are persons who have never yet come to themselves ; are almost utter strangers to just thought, a sound understanding, and their own true interest. You may observe some of them reeling in almost every street, uttering profaneness or ribaldry in every company, boisterous and troublesome in their families, disturbing and grieving all the grave and sober about them. They ridicule those who will not comply with fashionable follies, and "he that departeth from evil is accounted mad" by them, Isa. lix. 15. And may we not, alas ! in some instances take up the prophet Hosea's complaint, "The prophet is a fool ; the spiritual man is mad," Hos. ix. 7 ? This is the lamentable state of what we call a Christian nation ; and while commerce, learning, and what is styled politeness flourish, religion, which is the supreme good of a rational being, and, as some say, the only thing by which a man is distinguished from the brutes, is almost lost among us. Such is our wisdom ! such our politeness ! Who that thinks and judges and feels as he ought, but will take up a lamentation, and say, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night" for the melancholy state of my fellow-creatures ! Are there any of you, Sirs, in these unhappy circumstances ; unconcerned about your souls and eternity, strangers to repentance and faith, and without God in the world ? This, certainly, if any, is a lucid interval, a sober moment, a proper time of addressing you, when I may have some hope of success. And what is it I would advise you to, but that, with the prodigal in the text, you consider and argue with yourselves ? Reason and conscience, if you will give them leave to speak, are on the side of religion. A thousand arguments taken from gratitude and ingenuity, from duty and interest, will at once present themselves, if you indulge a few cool and sober thoughts. Think what your desires and aversions, your hopes and fears are at present, and ask yourselves calmly what they ought to be, and regulate your conduct accordingly. Shake off, I beseech you, that careless, trifling disposition, which is the disgrace of a man and the general source of wickedness and destruction. Take the matter this day into serious consideration. If you will not do it, it is a sign your malady is dangerous, obstinate, and almost incurable. When heaven and hell, an eternity of happiness or misery, are in question, it is madness, the greatest madness imaginable, to defer attention and reflection. If you are conscious you are yet in an uncon-

verted state, earnestly apply to God by prayer, that he would give you a sound mind. And, if no better motive will influence you, let your present uneasiness, and the fear and forebodings of future misery, lead you to "think on your ways and turn your feet to God's testimonies."

2. *We see the benefit of afflictions.* The young prodigal never came to himself and thought of returning to his father, till his money was spent and he was perishing with hunger. Poverty, disappointment, sickness, especially that which is the immediate consequence of luxury and irregular indulgences, are often the means of leading men to repentance. They force them to think. God brings men under such painful discipline, in order to awaken and reform them; as rough methods are sometimes necessary to be used, in order to bring distracted people to their senses. The connexion which God hath established between sin and misery in this world, tends to recommend religion and to reform sinners. And many have found that "it is good for them to be afflicted; for before that time they went astray like the prodigal, but by this discipline they learned God's statutes." It is especially "good," as the prophet observeth, "for a man to bear this yoke in his youth;" that by "sitting alone and keeping silence" he may be led to consider his ways, and with deep humility and repentance, "put his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope," Lam. iii. 27, 29.

3. *They have great reason to be thankful who have a sound mind.* It is a pleasure to address those who will consider what is said; who know what true religion means, and have a relish for the rational, manly pleasures of devotion, holiness, and benevolence. To you, my brethren, I address, and call upon you to give thanks to the Father, who hath redeemed you from the dominion of sin, set right your disordered understandings, corrected your depraved taste, taught you to discern those things that differ, and approve and pursue those that are really excellent. You can recollect the time when you were "foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures," and mad upon this or the other idol, which possessed your heart. But now it is otherwise. Let God have the praise of his own work; for nothing less than a power divinely strong can assuage the disorderly passions, and dispose the soul to pursue solid good. And let it be your care to show your gratitude to the great Physician, by pursuing his course of medicine and discipline, till the cure is completed and you are got beyond all danger of the distemper's return. Be often examining yourselves, how you improve your enlightened understandings; and what care you take to furnish yourselves with antidotes against a relapse. Show your gratitude also, by endeavouring to save others; especially any of your family, friends, and relations, who may not be themselves. Would you not do what you could to cure them

of lunacy? If their heads were disordered, you would spare no pains nor expense to bring them to their understandings. And have you no concern for those who are labouring under the worst kind of madness, the madness of the heart? Let me entreat you to look upon them as the greatest objects of pity. Watch every sober moment, every favourable interval, to admonish and exhort them; especially when they are feeling the bad effects of sin themselves, or see others suffering them. Let nothing be undone, that faithful reproof, tender expostulation, serious persuasion, and fervent prayer can do, to bring them to themselves, and restore them to the paths of virtue and happiness. And may God quicken you to, and prosper you in, every such pious attempt!

4. *What pity is it that any of a sound understanding should be companions of those who are beside themselves.* How contemptible doth the representation in the text make all wicked men appear to the eye of sober reason! And how unbecoming is it for wise and good men to be the companions of fools! You would reckon it a just reproach to your understanding, and a disgrace to your family and friends, to associate with a madman. But what do you else, who enter into the path of the wicked and make them your chosen associates? And is not this the case with those who are most fond of public company and diversions? "I am a companion," saith David, "of them that fear thee, and keep thy precepts." "The saints, the excellent of the earth, in them is my delight." "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the assembly of evil-doers." And he gives this character of a good man, that "in his eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honours them who fear the Lord." The sentiment suggested in the text should make all, and especially young persons, extremely cautious whom they choose as companions for life; and their parents, whom they countenance, and with whom they place their children in any relation. Rakes and sots and infidels are the worst sort of madmen; and he that puts his son apprentice to a wicked man, or marries his daughter to a rake or a scorner, is much more criminal, and injurious to his child, than he who was to form such an alliance for it with a man disordered in his senses. And that for this plain reason; because this kind of madness is infectious; it is a catching distemper; and what Solomon advises in one species of this moral madness is applicable to all: "Make no fellowship with an angry man, and with a furious man," that is, a drunken, passionate, ill-tempered man, "thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his way, and get a snare to thy soul," Prov. xxii. 24. They who are employed to attend distracted persons often become by degrees unaffected with their case, and are not shocked at their folly and rage; it is the same in the madness

of the heart. Associating with those who are not themselves, takes off the horror and dread of vice, and by making it familiar brings a well-disposed mind first to bear it, then to relish it, and then practise it. Suffer therefore the word of exhortation, my young friends; "enter not into the way of the wicked, nor go in the path of evil men; avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away." This is a duty peculiarly incumbent upon you, who have devoted yourselves to God and his service. You will sometimes find the truth of what St. Peter observed, that those who "walk in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, and banquetings," will "think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot," and they will therefore "speak evil of you," reproach you, and banter you, 1 Pet. iv. 4. But look upon all this as the folly and nonsense of a distempered mind; and pay no more regard to it than you would to the ravings of a madman, for it is no better. Pity and pray for them, but do not mind them; and get out of hearing as soon as you can. You are, through grace, come to yourselves; take care you do not lose yourselves again, by bad company, sinful indulgences, or neglecting watchfulness and prayer. And to prevent this, keep close to Christ and his gospel; and devote to his service those powers, which his grace hath rescued from misery and ruin. Thus we read that the lunatic, whom Jesus had healed, "sat at his feet, clothed and in his right mind," Luke viii. 35.

DISCOURSE XVII.

ST. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR ONESIPHORUS, THAT HE MIGHT FIND
MERCY OF THE LORD IN THAT DAY.

2 TIMOTHY I. 18.

The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.

THERE is a lamentable imperfection in the character of many Christians, who are possessed of several amiable qualities. Some who have refined sentiments of benevolence, and much of a generous, friendly temper, seem to have very little of a devotional spirit, and of those regards to eternal concerns, which the importance of them requires. Whereas others, who have much of a devotional spirit, and piety towards God, are defective in the social virtues, and those grateful friendly dispositions, which they ought to manifest towards their fellow-creatures. These imperfections of character are the more inexcusable, as in the gospel we have both a perfect rule of duty and several excellent patterns of it. Next to the example of our divine Master, that of the apostle Paul shines brightest. In him we find a happy union of fervent piety, and grateful, tender friendship; and both

are admirably expressed in our text ; which, as a learned critic observes, is " a more pathetic and lively parenthesis, than is to be met with among any of the writers of Greece or Rome." He had been informing Timothy how kind Onesiphorus had been to him ; that he had often refreshed him by his company and his contributions ; had ministered to him in many things at Ephesus ; sought him out very diligently, and found him, during his confinement at Rome ; and was ever ready to honour, assist, and comfort him, as an apostle of Christ, and a sufferer for his cause ; and in the middle of this account of Onesiphorus's kindness, he inserts the parenthesis in our text, " The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day." The expression, " The Lord grant that he may receive of the Lord," is agreeable to the usual manner of speaking among the Hebrews ; and only means that the Lord would grant him mercy. Thus it is said, " The Lord rained upon Sodom fire and brimstone from the Lord ;" that is, from himself, Gen. xix. 24. So we read that " Solomon assembled the elders of Israel unto king Solomon," 1 Kings viii. 1. The same person is therefore meant by " the Lord" in both places in which it is used in the text. The words furnish the following useful remarks :

I. There is a great day approaching—the day of judgment.

II. All men are then to appear and be tried.

III. None can merit any reward at that day.

IV. To find mercy then is the greatest blessing.

I. *There is a great and solemn day approaching.*

The apostle speaks of his finding mercy " at that day." It is plain he refers to the second coming of Christ, to the day of the general resurrection, and final judgment. So he saith (v. 12), " He is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day." Likewise in this epistle he speaks of " the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge would give him in that day" (iv. 8). He elsewhere speaks of Christ being " revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, to punish the wicked and be glorified in his saints, in that day," 2 Thess. i. 10. So that the expression plainly refers to the day of judgment. And when the apostle only calls it " that day," it may intimate these two things, that it was a day much expected and talked of by Christians, and was a most important and awful day.

It intimates that it was a day much expected and talked of by Christians, on which not only the thoughts of the apostle, but their thoughts were much fixed. Timothy very well knew what day St. Paul meant by the phrase. He knew his thoughts were full of it. He had often heard him mention it in his conversation and sermons, and urge its speedy approach and great solemnity, as powerful motives to holiness. The eyes and hopes

of all Christians were directed to it by the apostles ; especially when they were suffering persecution for the profession of Christianity. It was a day they looked and longed for. The apostle's own thoughts were peculiarly fixed upon it, considering what clear discoveries he had been favoured with of the great transactions of it. And as he was now expecting death every day, and apprehended that "the time of his departure was at hand," 2 Tim. iv. 6, it was very natural for him to have it much upon his heart and upon his tongue. The expression *may* likewise intimate, that "it was a most important and awful day ;" more so than any other day, and therefore called, by way of eminence, "that day ;" that great and solemn day, with which no other day is worthy to be compared. It is called "a day," as it is a period of time, in which many signal events shall come to pass. So we read of "the day of grace," and "the day of salvation." It is likewise called "the great day ;" "the judgment of the great day ;" because great scenes are then to open and great affairs to be determined. And it is styled "the last day," because then is the end of the world ; there will be no more time, but a vast eternity will commence. Most awful scenes introduce that day ; the descent of the Judge from heaven in all his pomp and glory ; the resurrection of all the dead ; and the burning of this world. All mankind, who ever lived upon the earth, are then to be raised and appear together in one vast assembly, to have their characters tried and their future eternal state determined. The Lord Jesus Christ shall then come down from heaven, "in his own glory, and in his Father's glory, with all his holy angels," to preside on this grand occasion. The consequences of that day prove it to be a most awful and important one. For all mankind are then to be separated into two divisions ; the wicked to go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. The mediatorial kingdom of Christ is to be delivered up to the Father, and all the schemes of providence relating to this world of ours to be completed. It is with great propriety therefore that the apostle calls it "that day," and fixed his thoughts so much upon it, and directs the thoughts of Christians so much to it. Let us observe,

II. *At that day all men are to appear and be tried.*

When the apostle speaks of "finding mercy of the Lord," that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, it intimates that he is then to be revealed from heaven, as the judge of the world, by whose judgment every man must stand or fall ; agreeably to what he told the Athenians, that "God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead," Acts xvii. 21. That

all must then be tried is frequently asserted in scripture: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." The "dead, small and great," are to "stand before God;" and he shall "judge the secrets of all hearts by Jesus Christ." St. Paul takes it for granted that his pious friend Onesiphorus must stand at that tribunal. This intimates to us that there is no man's character so good and excellent, but he must be tried and judged. And there are some reasons why it is proper and fitting that the righteous as well as the wicked should be judged. It is necessary to manifest their real characters. The best characters are mixed and imperfect; and there are spots and blemishes in many good men, which make it sometimes doubtful in what rank they are to be placed. Many of them live in obscurity, are not at all known to the world; and in times of great degeneracy, they are peculiarly desirous to conceal their virtues, that they may not be persecuted by the impious, and scorned by the proud. Therefore it is fit that the excellency of their characters should be illustrated and displayed before the whole world. It is likewise fit it should be so, not only for their honour, but for the honour of God; to manifest the equity, wisdom, and goodness of Providence towards them; and for the honour of Christ also; to show the effect of his gospel and ordinances, and with how much complacency and kindness he accepts and applauds his servants. The text intimates,

III. *None can merit any reward at that day:*

That the obedience of none is so perfect, as to give them a just claim to future glory. The character of Onesiphorus was an excellent one. His regard for St. Paul undoubtedly arose from a sincere love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the cause in which the apostle laboured, and for which he was now suffering. He was not ashamed of the apostle's chain (v. 16), when he was confined as a prisoner; but sought him out, relieved, and assisted him, though in so doing he ran the hazard of being a fellow-sufferer with him. This kindness he had shown to the apostle at many times, and in different places, as the context proves. Now who was more likely to deserve a future reward, than so upright, zealous, and friendly a Christian? Yet the apostle plainly intimates that there was no room for merit, even in his case. For you will observe, he doth not say that he might have justice done him, but that he might find mercy. And this is indeed the general strain of the gospel. Thus our Lord directs his disciples, when they had done all things that were commanded, to acknowledge that they were "unprofitable servants," and had done no more than their duty. The apostles often remind Christians, that "by grace they are saved;" that it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy that he saves us," Titus

iii. 5. That, if we are "begotten to the lively hope of an heavenly inheritance," it is "according to God's abundant mercy." Thus the heirs of heaven are called "vessels of mercy." And you are well acquainted with that passage, where the apostle alters his phrase, to prevent our entertaining any opinion of merit; "The wages of sin is death;" it is its due desert; "but the gift of God," not the wages of righteousness, "is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. vi. 23. Agreeably to the language of our text, the apostle Jude describes the future glory, as "the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." And indeed how should it be otherwise? If we consider the holiness of God, the purity and extent of his law, in how many instances we come short of our duty, and with how many imperfections our best services are attended, boasting must be for ever excluded. Whatever good we do, the ability and inclination to do it are from God. We must appear before the tribunal of Christ as miserable sinners, who cannot deny our guilt, or answer the charge which God's law and our own consciences bring against us; and if he should mark iniquity we could not stand. We therefore lie entirely at God's mercy, and upon that must cast ourselves. We must seek for justification upon some other ground than our own merit, and look for a reward, "not of debt, but grace." I observe, once more,

IV. *To find mercy then is the greatest blessing.*

The apostle's heart was full of gratitude for the kindness and respect which his friend had shown him, and was disposed to ask for him the most valuable favour. It was not in the apostle's power to make any returns in kind; and therefore he directs his prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, that he would show mercy to him at that day. He knew this was far better than riches or health, honour or long life upon earth. Nor was it adequate to the gratitude which he felt glowing in his breast, to ask for his friend only a supply of spiritual blessings. But he fixes upon that which was most important, and in which every thing truly valuable for this world was comprehended: for it is in effect a prayer that his sins might be pardoned; that he might be interested in the Lord Jesus Christ, and stand fast in him; that he might be kept from apostasy, increase in wisdom, piety, and usefulness, and might have grace to persevere unto the end. But what I apprehend the apostle had principally in his thoughts in such a petition was this; he expected soon to be put to death, and thought it highly probable he should never see Onesiphorus again, and be able to show his gratitude by personal converse and kindness. He had an assurance that he himself should find mercy of the Lord, or as he expresseth it (v. 12), that "Christ would keep that which he had committed to him against that day." It was therefore his earnest desire that this

kind friend might be a partaker with him of that mercy; that he might have a comfortable interview with him at the tribunal of Christ, and spend an eternity in mutual friendship, and adoration of the mercy they had received. Finding mercy, then, comprehends everlasting happiness, and all the glories which the Lord, the righteous and merciful Judge, shall give to his faithful servants, and all that assistance and grace which are necessary to preserve them safe to the possession of them. These then are the remarks which our text affords; that there is a great day, the day of judgment, approaching; that all men are then to appear and be tried; that the best can plead no merit at that day, but must look for mercy; and that to find mercy then is the greatest and most valuable blessing to an immortal creature. The useful instructions which the subject furnisheth are these.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us think much of that day of the Lord*, that awful, solemn day, on which the thoughts of the holy apostle were so much fixed, and to which his views, desires, and hopes were all directed and referred. What is any particular day, my brethren, compared with this? Or what events can the human imagination conceive, of equal grandeur, solemnity, and importance, with those which are then to happen? That day is appointed from the foundation of the world, kept secret in the divine breast, and revealed neither to men nor angels, nor even to Christ himself; a day, in which great things are to be done; a great judge to descend; a great assembly to be convened, even all mankind, all with looks vastly important, and hearts big with expectation. It is a day in which we are every one of us concerned; for we must all appear and take our trial for eternity. What are all the concerns of earth, the great affairs of nations and kingdoms, but mere trifles, compared with this great day? What madness is there in the hearts of the sons of men, that they are so busy in making preparations for future days on earth, and yet live unmindful of this day, when their characters are to be discovered, and their everlasting state fixed? Let us guard against this common, this fatal delusion. Let that day be in our thoughts every day, and the grand descriptions given of it in scripture be made familiar to our minds. Let us speak of it frequently and seriously, and never be ashamed to acknowledge, that we look for it and are influenced in our conduct by a regard to it. "Wherefore, my beloved, seeing we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"

2. *Let us frequently offer up this petition for ourselves and our friends.* Let us present it for ourselves. A more important and comprehensive petition we cannot use. Let us seriously consider, how much we need the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ; how

much the best of men need it; and say with Job, "Though I were righteous, yet would I not answer him; but I would make supplication to my judge," Job ix. 15. Let us endeavour to impress these thoughts deeply upon our hearts, that all salvation is of grace; that all our Christian privileges and hopes are founded upon divine mercy; that our best obedience and righteousness cannot answer the demands of the law of God, "for in many things we offend all." Some bad or mean ends are apt to mingle with our most commendable actions; or if they are right in the sight of the Lord, it is by his strength that they are performed. Too much stress hath been laid upon charity or alms-giving, in the present day, as if it would atone for the neglect of other duties, and of itself entitle men to salvation;* but the apostle was of another mind. Onesiphorus's charity was very eminent; it flowed from a good principle, produced a succession of benevolent actions, and was performed at the hazard of his life; yet the apostle commends him to divine mercy, and in effect directs him to fix his hopes upon it. As we need to offer up this prayer for ourselves, so we have great encouragement to do it. The text intimates, that our judge is merciful; merciful in all his relations and characters, as our prophet, priest, and king; and will not surely appear less so, when he shall come to judge the living and the dead. By his death and sufferings he hath purchased and procured for us the offers of mercy; and for himself, power and authority to raise the dead, and to confer everlasting salvation on all them who sincerely believe in him. A serious remembrance of this weighty truth will tend to humble the pride of our hearts, advance our love to Christ, and promote our conformity to his image and his laws. Yea, a life spent in his service may be properly closed with this petition; and it is good to die repenting, and believing, and crying for mercy. Possidonius, who wrote the life of St. Augustine, saith, that he heard him often say in his health, that "repentance was the fittest disposition both for dying Christians and ministers;" and that he died with tears in his eyes, weeping for sin. The pious Mor-nay, Lord Plessis, in his dying moments lifting up his hands, cried three times, "Mercy, mercy, mercy;" declaring that he did this to show that he relied alone on divine mercy. Thus Archbishop Usher and the learned and pious Mr. Perkins both died crying for mercy.

Let us learn from the apostle to offer up this petition for our friends and benefactors. I think I need not caution you against offering up this petition for your friends that are dead; although

* "The most essential part of virtue is relieving the distressed. This affords that perfect repose and divine contentment to the soul, which fills up the whole capacity of bliss, and leaves not even a wish for more. The *only* source of lasting pleasure in sickness and death, is a reflection on having relieved the distresses of our fellow-creatures," &c.—Dr. Browne. Many such incautious and dangerous tenets might be quoted from various charity sermons.

the papists ground their practice of praying for the dead in part upon our text; taking it for granted that Onesiphorus was dead, because St. Paul, in the preceding verse, mentions his household. Whereas it is likely his family was now with Timothy, and Onesiphorus was with himself at Rome. We have no reason to believe that our prayers will reach the dead, or any way affect their state. But the serious prayers of a righteous man avail much for his friends while on earth. It is our duty to pray one for another, in order to express and cherish our friendly dispositions and benevolent affections. Whatever favours we receive, gratitude requires that we make some returns; and as there are many instances in which we cannot return, in kind, the favours we receive, through the better circumstances of our friends and benefactors, or their distance from us, it is our duty to commend them to divine mercy. It is very proper, when we think of our friends, to lift up our hearts to God in a short ejaculation for their everlasting happiness; and in our correspondence with them, to imitate St. Paul in our text, by inserting (as a parenthesis) a devout wish that they may find mercy. This will keep in our own thoughts, and may impress upon theirs, a sense of eternal concerns, and engage the favour of heaven. If you are Christians indeed, there is nothing will give you greater joy at present, than to see your relations and friends pursuing the same happiness which you are pursuing; and it will add to your eternal joy, to observe your Christian friends partakers with you of the mercy of the Lord. Let parents particularly, be often putting up this prayer for their children; and especially in family worship, when praying with them. In your conversation together, remind them that this is the main thing which they should seek for themselves; that their views should extend beyond the narrow limits of this mortal life; and that this great and awful day is coming; that they may be prepared for it. This leads me to add, if we desire to find mercy of the Lord in that day,

3. *Let us labour to be prepared for this mercy.* Though our salvation is of grace, we are required to "work it out with fear and trembling." Though our dependence is to be on the mercy of Christ, yet we are required, by the apostle Jude, to "keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life," Jude 21. The mercy of Christ is not bestowed at random or with partiality. There are some qualifications required on our part; and it is of the greatest importance that we attend to them, and endeavour to secure them. The "wicked must forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord;" and then "he will have mercy upon him." It is necessary likewise that we believe in the name of his Son, and live by faith in him; that with all humility and cheerfulness we submit to the righteousness of God, build all

our hopes upon Christ as the sure foundation, which God hath laid, and that we honour God and the Redeemer by a course of sincere obedience. Remember that this obedience will not and cannot be the meritorious cause of our acceptance and finding mercy ; but will be our evidence that we are interested in Christ, and may, agreeably to the gracious constitution of the gospel, hope for mercy at last. Let it be our care, that we do not look for that in ourselves which is only to be found in Christ, and in his righteousness and all-sufficiency. If we desire to find mercy of the Lord, let us be careful to cultivate a friendly, charitable disposition ; to show kindness to our brethren, and especially to Christ's poor members and to his ministers ; more particularly when they are confined by sickness, or suffering for conscience sake. In this last circumstance Onesiphorus ministered to Paul and refreshed him. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." "But he shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shown no mercy." Such are the declarations of him who will be our final judge. To excite you to these regards to the gospel, consider the sad consequence of not finding mercy of the Lord ; and that will be a "punishment with everlasting destruction from his presence and the glory of his power." The disobedient and unbelieving will find that "he who made them will have no mercy upon them, and he that formed them will show them no favour." If mercy be not earnestly sought now, it will be too late to seek it in that day. Mercy will then be turned into "vengeance and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Consider, on the other hand, the comfortable assurance given us, that in the appointed way we shall obtain mercy. God's terms are most gracious, and suited to the circumstances of depraved and feeble creatures. It is happy for us that the worthy Judge eternal is most kind and merciful ; and, having dwelt in mortal flesh, is acquainted with our temptations and infirmities, and disposed to make every favourable allowance for us which the holiness of his nature will permit. "He taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." "Having therefore such a merciful and faithful high priest, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Amen.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

GOD'S PROMISE TO JOSHUA, THAT HE SHOULD WALK AMONG THE ANGELS.

ZECHARIAH III. 6, 7.

And the angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.

THE design of God's promises, my brethren, is to quicken us to diligence in the work which he hath given us to do. And as he calls out some of his servants to labours peculiarly important and difficult, he hath furnished them with promises peculiarly precious and encouraging, that they may "not faint and grow weary in their minds." The promises he made to his servants of old are applicable to us, as far as there is a resemblance between our circumstances and theirs. And it appears to be the design of God, that we should take encouragement from them, for they "were written for our instruction and consolation," Rom. xv. 4. It is very observable, that God made promises of future glory both to Zerubbabel, to Daniel, and Joshua, who lived in troublous times, and were very zealous for the Lord of Hosts, in order to encourage them amidst their difficulties and opposition. That which he made to Joshua the high priest of Israel, just after the captivity, I propose to consider at this time. The angel of Jehovah, spoken of in the text is, I apprehend, our Lord Jesus Christ; he is represented under that title and office. He "protested to Joshua," that is, he earnestly and solemnly affirmed, or assured him in God's name, perhaps, with a solemn oath. This denoted, that what he was going to say was a matter of great concern and importance. He said to him in the presence of his attendant angels, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." In this passage we may observe,

I. What is required of Joshua; and

II. What is promised to him.

Or, how he was to behave, and what blessedness would attend his good behaviour. Let us consider,

I. *What is required of Joshua,*

Or how he was to behave. He was to "walk in God's ways, and keep his charge;" which signified a general care to be religious himself, and a faithful performance of the duties of his particular station.

1. A general care to be religious himself. "If thou wilt walk in my ways," the ways God had marked out or commanded his servants to walk in. Joshua was the high priest of Israel; yet he must not think it sufficient to instruct others in their duty and perform the services of his function, but he must be good himself. He must not think that the dignity of his station, or the greatness of his priestly work, would excuse him from discharging his duty, as a rational creature and an Israelite; but he was to observe all the moral and general rules of duty, which were given from heaven, either by the dictates of reason, or the law of Moses. Reason tells men in general what is right and good, what they are to do, and what they are to avoid. The voice of reason and conscience is the voice of God. Our knowledge of good and evil is the law of God written upon our hearts. Beside this, Joshua had the law of Moses; and that he was to read and study and meditate upon, for the direction of his own conduct. He was to be influenced by a regard to the presence and authority of God, and act in his office from such principles, and with such a temper, as would render his services pleasing and acceptable to him. He was to proceed steadily in the ways of holiness, and never to turn aside from them to the right hand or the left. God required of him,

2. A faithful performance of the duties of his station. "If thou wilt keep my charge." By this phrase the service of the priests is described in the law of Moses. "Bring the tribe of Levi near, that they may keep his charge, and the charge of the children of Israel. And the Levites shall keep the charge, and do the service of the tabernacle. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge," Numb. iii. 7, viii. 26. Joshua was set apart to preside over the affairs of the congregation. And some of the highest acts of worship and service, that were required by the law, were to be performed by the high priest alone. He was to study this law, that he might know and perform his own duty, and be able to teach others; and though there was much indolence and selfishness among the people, he was not to omit any of the rites which the law required, nor connive at the omission of them in others; but exert himself with all zeal and activity to promote the observance of what God had required. He was to consider his office, in all its branches, as a charge from God, a trust lodged in his hands. He was to keep it with an elevation and resolution of soul suited to the importance of the charge itself, and the greatness and majesty of that God whose charge it was, and as one that was accountable to him for the manner in which he kept it. This then was required of Joshua, that he should walk in God's ways, be religious and holy himself; and keep God's charge, faithfully perform his duty as the high priest of Israel. Let us now consider,

II. *What is promised to Joshua in consequence of so doing.*

And it was in general, that if he would do the duty of his place and office, he should have the dignity and reward of it; he should be continued in his office; and at length be preferred to a nobler station, in which he should be a companion with the angels.

1. That he should be continued in his office. "Then shalt thou also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts." It is promised, that he should be continued high priest and not displaced; that no enemy should break in upon his country to disturb the orders of God's house, or remove him from the priesthood. It may also intimate that the office should continue in his family. Accordingly it appears, by the book of Nehemiah, that it did, for about two hundred years, till the time of Alexander the Great, and perhaps much longer, Neh. xii. 10, 11. It may intimate, that God would not transfer the priesthood from his family, as he did from Eli's, on account of the wickedness of his sons. "Thou shalt also judge my house." This may refer to the judicial power the high priest had; not to make laws, but, like our judges, to explain and enforce them. Many questions and controversies were brought before the high priests, and they determined them according to the law. "Thou shalt also keep my courts;" keep them from being profaned by strangers or Israelites; preside in the service of my courts without interruption or molestation; have the inferior priests under thy direction and command, and see that my laws and ordinances are regularly observed. It may particularly intimate, that he should live to see the temple, which was now building, finished, the appointed sacrifices offered, and its services frequented; that he should have an opportunity of performing all his pious purposes for the glory of God and the good of Israel; by whom he should be esteemed and respected for all the good deeds he had done for the house of God and the offices thereof. This is the favour promised him with regard to the present life. To which I am to add, which is the main thing I proposed to recommend to your regard,

2. That at length he should be preferred to a nobler station, in which he should be a companion of angels. In this vision the angels are represented as present, attending "the Angel of the Lord," who is, perhaps, never described as appearing without them (compare ch. ii. 3). In verse 4 he saith to those that stood before him, "Take away Joshua's filthy garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by," while they did it. In the text he saith, "I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by," probably pointing to them. Commentators agree, that by "these that stand by" is meant the angels; but they in general understand it as referring to angels, who invisibly attended the service of the temple. To denote this

there were images of cherubims carved on the ark, and worked in the hangings of the most holy place, as the attendants of the cloud of glory, the emblem of the divine presence. To this some suppose there is an allusion, when Solomon cautions men against rash vows, and adds, "Say not before the angel it was an error," Eccl. v. 6. And St. Paul is supposed to refer to their presence in Christian assemblies when he saith, "A woman ought to be veiled because of the angels," 1 Cor. xi. 10. But as in this sense the words are a mere repetition of what went before, that he should keep God's courts, I think they must have a further meaning. Nor can I understand them, with some interpreters, only to mean that angels should guard and preserve him in all his goings and undertakings. The most natural, easy sense of the words is, that they refer to a future state, and mean, that Joshua should at length be joined to the angels in heaven. In this sense most of the Jewish writers understand it, and their most ancient paraphrase reads it, "I will raise thee from the dead, and place thee among the seraphims." It is promised to Joshua, that he should be removed to a higher station, and be engaged in nobler work; have a place among angels in God's heavenly temple, and walk with them. This must imply an acquaintance and friendship with them; that he should know them, love them, and be beloved by them; for "can two walk together except they are agreed?" So God promiseth to walk with Israel, as their friend. Whatever happiness angels enjoy, Joshua was to share it with them. And there may, perhaps, be an allusion to the galleries and piazzas about the temple, where the priests used to walk and converse together.

And now, my brethren, this is a most delightful and instructive idea of the heavenly world, which the text gives us, as walking among the angels. And give me leave a little to enlarge upon it. It is true concerning all that walk in God's ways and keep his charge, that they shall have places among the angels. Heaven is the stated abode of these glorious, wise, holy, and happy spirits, who are superior to men; therefore they are called "the angels of God in heaven." It was the design of God, by the dispensation of the gospel, as the apostle expresseth it, "to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth," Eph. i. 10; to unite the holy angels and all true believers in one body, and establish a sacred, everlasting harmony and friendship between them. Nay, our Lord himself hath told us, that good men "shall be as the angels of God in heaven," Matt. xxii. 30, shall be with them and like them. And, in the revelation of St. John, the redeemed of the Lord and angels are represented as in one place, and joining in the same acts of praise and thanksgiving. Therefore we are said to be "come to an in-

numerable company of angels." Let us then consider what is the work and blessedness of angels, that we may enter into this grand idea of future glory. And we must take our notions of this from the word of God alone, for every thing else is chiefly conjecture. There our Lord tells us, "they behold the face of his heavenly Father;" are in a state of nearness to God and communion with him. They look upon him with infinite delight as their Father and friend, and he beams glory and felicity upon them. They are described as his willing, waiting servants, "hearkening to the voice of his word," and most cheerfully executing his pleasure. They are represented as standing before the throne and worshipping God. But they are sometimes sent abroad to perform the divine commands; yea, sent down to this earth, "to minister to the heirs of salvation," Heb. i. 14. Consequently, they must be in a state of the highest honour and happiness. Nearness to God, the devout worship of him, obedience to him, and doing good to others, constitute the supreme felicity of a rational creature. And there is nothing in the temper of the angels, nothing in their circumstances, nothing that can happen to them, which should destroy, or for a moment interrupt, their sublime delight. Whether they are in heaven, or executing the divine commands in other parts of God's dominions, they have *always* a most pleasurable and satisfying sense of his gracious presence and favour. Now God intends that all his faithful servants on earth should at length dwell and walk with them. And let us reflect what an honour and happiness this will be. For consider what excellent beings they are in themselves; and consider them as those who have been ministers of God to the world, to the church, and to ourselves.

(1.) Consider what excellent beings they are in themselves. And here I will not speak of the magnificence and splendour of their appearance, though that may afford their companions some pleasure; nor of the glory and grandeur of the places in which we are to walk with them; but of their intellectual and moral qualities; or, in plainer language, their great wisdom and goodness. They are much superior to man in all spiritual excellencies, particularly in wisdom. To be "wise as an angel of God" is a proverbial expression for an uncommon degree of wisdom, 2 Sam. xiv. 20. Their capacities, which were originally great and noble, are undoubtedly much improved by long experience and observation. The compass of their knowledge is vast, and they are well skilled in all the mysteries of creation, providence, and redemption. They are also beings of great condescension, affability, and benevolence, who will take delight in communicating knowledge to mankind. They will instruct us without any distant or forbidding airs, allow us to ask questions for our information, and not charge us with

ignorance, weakness, or impertinence. We may be free with them, without being overawed by their presence, or discouraged by their behaviour. It is likely that they have better methods of communicating knowledge to us than we have to one another; can set important truths before us in a plain, distinct, and convincing manner, and speak more directly to our hearts. Beside this, they are holy beings, and have a warm zeal for the honour of God and the good of men. So that the example of their piety, obedience, and love, will be most instructive and alluring to us; and whatever be the subject of our converse with them, they will doubtless turn it into a religious channel, and lead and direct all our thoughts to God. We shall catch a sacred ardour from their lips, and emulate their excellencies. Now, my friends, how delightful must it be to converse with such glorious beings on terms of the most endearing friendship and familiarity! One of the greatest pleasures of earth is to converse with wise and pious persons; with those who have read much, both of books and men, especially if they have also travelled through the most remarkable parts of this earth; with men who are communicative of the knowledge they have, and will take pleasure in entertaining and improving their fellow-mortals. How much more pleasant must it be to converse with the angels, those travellers and philosophers of heaven, whose knowledge is so extensive, and their tempers so amiable! Had Moses, David, or Paul lived till now, how delightful would an interview with one of them have been! How often, when I have been puzzled with some obscure passages in their writings, and more puzzled with the different opinions of interpreters, would I have been glad to have had an explanation of it from themselves! But the angels, who are greater in knowledge, will afford yet clearer light and higher entertainment than prophets and apostles themselves. A person being asked by his friend to dine, and being told what was for dinner, made this wise reply: "I do not want a bill of fare; I want a bill of the company, that I may know what mental entertainment I shall have." God hath invited all his children to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, and he hath told them that they shall sit down, not only with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the saints, but with the angels of God there. Further, let us

(2.) Consider them as those who have been the ministers of God to this world, to the church, and ourselves; and this will make walking with them in heaven more delightful. Were they only wise and holy beings, their converse would be agreeable. But it is probable that, among the ten thousand times ten thousand of them who minister before God, we shall be most intimately acquainted, and most frequently walk, with those who have been most connected with our earth, and are

best acquainted with the state of it. The angel, whom St. John would have worshipped, said, "Do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book," Rev. xxii. 9. They are all our fellow-servants, as having one great and glorious Master. But those are particularly so, who have been sent forth to minister to the sons of men; and the thought of walking and conversing with them is very endearing. Suppose yourselves in the company of those who appeared at giving the law; carried Elijah into heaven; bore Daniel company in the lions' den; or those who stood by when the angel of the Lord spoke to Joshua the words of our text. Suppose yourselves, Christians, walking with those of them who ushered in the birth of Christ, attended his resurrection, and ascended with him to heaven; how pleasing would such an interview be! Think of seeing others who have been the guardians of the British isles, fought our battles for us, and often, especially at the revolution, ruled the winds in our favour. With what delight should we look upon them, and hear their accounts of those wonderful appearances of providence? Some of them, I doubt not, have been the guardians of that particular Christian church to which *we* belong, and ministered to our fathers and companions now with God. With what pleasure shall we converse with them, who have done so many signal services for those from whom we are descended, and whose memory is so dear to us! Among their shining hosts, we shall meet with those who have been our guardians, and often encamped about us; and to converse with them must be peculiarly delightful. We shall learn from themselves, when and how they defended us; that at such a time they saved us from death; in such a place bore us up in their arms and preserved all our bones; sometimes gave our thoughts a sudden turn, when we were pursuing a bad scheme; diverted our attention to something else, when we were entering into temptation; allayed the storm of passion, when it was leading us to expose ourselves, grieve our friends, and dishonour religion; in a word, how often they directed, preserved, supported, and comforted us. And though we are forbid to worship them, we shall, doubtless, make them the most grateful acknowledgments; and perhaps in some degree repay the obligations we are under. For, having been in mortal bodies, we may know some things which even they do not, or give them clearer ideas of what they are already acquainted with. The church in heaven will be so far like that on earth, that all the members of it have not the same office, and the greatest cannot say to the least, "I have no need of thee." But I must not allow myself to dwell longer on this delightful thought. It is then a considerable and glorious part of the happiness of good men hereafter, that they shall walk with the angels, those eminently wise, holy, and bene-

volent beings; and particularly with those of them who have been employed to minister to our world, to the Christian church to which we belong, and to ourselves. Let me now add some reflections from this subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us reflect, for our caution, on the counterpart of this, or the future state of those who forsake the ways of God.* Our text implies, that if Joshua was not holy and faithful, he should have no place among the holy angels. Though the speculation we have been indulging is very pleasing, and I believe there are none who hear me so unaffected and stupid as not to wish this happiness may be theirs; yet I must, with Joshua, “keep God’s charge,” and deal faithfully with your consciences; informing you, upon the highest authority, that if you do not walk in God’s ways, you have neither part nor lot in this matter. I am to assure you, in his name, that the wicked shall be “turned into hell,” and “all that forget God” shall have their portion with “the devil and his angels;” that if you do not enter upon God’s ways, or if you forsake them; that if you walk in the way of sinners, go in the broad way in which the multitude run, the end will be destruction. Wicked ministers, parents, and masters of families, who have a charge committed to them by the Almighty, if they neglect it, and do not take such care of the souls entrusted to them, as God requires and their infinite value demands, they will go to their own place; a place far removed from the holy and happy angels; a place of everlasting misery and torment. You that frequent bad company, who are willing associates of rakes and sots, and spend many of your precious hours in gaming and mere amusement, you can have no place among the angels. They will shun your company, and you cannot relish theirs. Oh, think, sirs, I beseech you, what it is to have your abode among devils and damned spirits; in what forms of horror they may appear to you, who love nothing but what is gay and entertaining! What malicious cutting wit they may exercise upon you, who are proud, hasty, and cannot bear an affront, a slight, or even an admonition! They will inform you of the happiness you have lost; lay open to you the arts by which they corrupted and ruined you; and upbraid you for your folly, in being deluded to the loss of your souls. Think how will you like such society as this, that you may fly from the wrath to come, and never take one step more in the way that leadeth to destruction. I only add,

2. *Let us be excited to the duties required in the text, by the gracious promise contained in it.* What God required of Joshua, he requires of every one of us, to “walk in his ways and to keep his charge.” The ways of God are the ways of piety, integrity, purity, and charity. These we must enter upon by

repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ; and do it with deliberation, solemnity, and earnest prayer for divine guidance. In these ways we are to walk, circumspectly and steadily, without ever turning aside from them ; esteeming all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and hating every false way. There are particular ordinances which we are to keep, as the religious observance of the sabbath, attending public worship, and the Lord's supper. And it is to be our care to walk in all God's commandments and ordinances blameless. We are not to be governed by inclination and fashion, but by the will of God. Further, we are to be "companions of them that fear God," and talk of his precepts, to esteem "the saints the excellent of the earth," and have fellowship with them and delight in them ; else we can never be companions with God's holy ones in heaven. However difficult and rough the path may be, let us still walk in it ; endeavouring to do God's will on earth, as it is done by angels in heaven. They will then rejoice over us. They will strengthen and support us, and at length convey us to their happy abodes. We long for interviews with our dear relations and friends on earth ; and should not our hearts desire an interview with our friends in heaven ? and with the holy angels, whom we may number among the best of them ? "Angels from friendship gather half their joys." The connexions of grace will be stronger than those of nature, and, to holy beings, infinitely more endearing. It is pleasant to take a walk and converse with our friends in some agreeable spot upon earth ; but soon shall we walk among the angels in the heavenly paradise ; and be formed, by our common Head and Lord, to services and enjoyments like theirs. There, no storms, nor heat, nor cold, will incommode our walk ; no night interrupt it ; no envy, contention, difference, coldness, or distress will destroy our friendship with them, or lessen the pleasure of it. "The Angel of the Lord," the adorable Jesus, will join the company, and improve the converse. The ever-glorious and blessed God himself will, according to his promise, "dwell with us, be with us, and be our God," Rev. xxi. 3. And the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of the Lord. Let the hope of this animate us to keep the way of the Lord, and every charge he giveth us. And let us be often, as it were, taking a walk among the angels now, by faith and meditation on future glory. Endeavour to live as like angels now as possible, by a holy superiority to the unnecessary concerns of the body, and leading lives of devotion, purity, and benevolence. Then shall we know something of their blessedness here below, and have some delightful foretastes of the glory to be revealed. Oh happy day ! when we shall be set free from the cares, temptations, and sorrows of mortality ; be united to nobler orders of beings, and be for ever happy in their company, friendship, and love. I

cannot conclude without reminding you of, and entreating you to reflect on, the death of Christ, as that great event by which we are raised to such a hope. And do you follow the apostle's example, and connect in your thoughts what he hath so closely connected; "Ye are come to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel," Heb. xii. 24.

DISCOURSE XIX.

GOD'S EXPOSTULATION WITH JEHOIAKIM FOR DEGENERATING FROM HIS FATHER'S PIETY.

JEREMIAH XXII. 15, 16.

Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord.

IT is well known, that important truths and precepts engage more attention, and come with greater force upon the mind, when they are illustrated by suitable examples, than when they are barely proposed to our regard. In this view the historical part of the bible is extremely useful. Therein God hath thought proper to transmit to all generations both good and bad examples; the former as lights to direct us; the latter as warnings, which we should carefully attend to, amidst the hazardous scenes through which we are passing. The passage of which our text is a part is an instance of the latter kind. It is the character of a young prince, Jehoiakim, the son of a very pious and excellent father, even king Josiah; whose heart was tender, and who was zealous for the worship and honour of the Lord Jehovah. But his son degenerated, and God sent him an awful message by the prophet Jeremiah in our text and context. A woe is denounced against him for his pride, in building himself a fine house, when the nation was in great distress, and for the injustice and oppression with which he built it (v. 13, 14). "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; that saith, I will build me a wide house, and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar and painted with vermillion." Then in the text God expostulates with him for his wickedness; and it is represented as highly aggravated and quite inexcusable, because he had seen a bright example of piety and righteousness in his father. He had also seen with

how much prosperity, comfort, and honour his virtues had been attended. "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy, then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord." The words, taken in connexion with the context, will suggest some useful remarks, which I would particularly recommend to the regards of the young; especially those who have the honour to descend from religious parents. And they are these:

I. God remembereth the piety and usefulness of our ancestors, and observeth how far we resemble them.

II. Young people often forsake the religion of their fathers, through pride, and love of elegance and show.

III. It is a great disgrace and reproach to young persons to forsake the good ways of their parents.

IV. The way of religion is the way of wisdom, honour, and happiness. Let us observe,

I. God remembereth the piety and usefulness of our ancestors, and observeth how far we resemble them.

Thus in the text God appeals to Jehoiakim, "Did not thy father do judgment and justice,—judge the cause of the poor and needy?" Plainly intimating that his son neglected those duties. And he afterwards adds, "Thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it" (v. 17). The infinite eternal mind cannot possibly forget any thing. All things past, as well as present, are naked and open before his eyes. He remembers all the way in which our fathers walked; the secret piety of their hearts; the evidences of it in their lives, and all the service they did for God and their generation. He remembered how piously and uprightly Josiah walked, and mentions it to his honour. God hath a kind remembrance of his faithful servants, when they are departed out of this world; and is "not unrighteous to forget any work, and labour of love," which they have performed. It is very pleasing and instructive to observe, with how much respect God mentions those who had been upright before him. Many traces of this are to be found in the sacred writings, and the instance in our text is one of the most remarkable. This shows us that "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness;" that he holdeth good men in high esteem, and treats them as his favourites. This is a great encouragement to be religious: as thereby we shall enjoy the favour of God while we live, and have our memory precious in his sight, when we are removed out of this world and are perhaps forgotten by survivors. This also should be a motive to us all, particularly to the children of pious parents, to reverence the memory of the saints, especially of our

holy ancestors, and give them their just honour. We should think and speak of them with veneration; mention their imperfections (if it be needful to do it) with candour and tenderness, and make use of these as cautions to ourselves. Justice to them, and a regard to our own credit and happiness, require that we recall their virtues to mind, and speak of them to their praise; that, feeling the attraction of their good examples, we may be transformed into their likeness. Let it be further observed under this head, that God takes notice how far we resemble them. Thus he chargeth it upon Jehoiakim, that he had not trod in his father's steps. God can and will make a just estimate, what our religious advantages are, compared with theirs, and what improvement we make of these advantages. He observeth every instance of declension from that which is good, and the principles from which our departures from God and religion flow. He taketh notice whether our hearts be right with God, as our fathers' were; whether, as was the case with Timothy, "the unfeigned faith that dwelt in them, dwell in us also;" or whether we swerve from their pious conduct and examples; and the same must be said of us, as of Solomon: "He went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father," 1 Kings xi. 4, 6. Let God's unerring knowledge of the true character of our pious ancestors, and our own true characters, be considered by us as an incentive to the utmost caution and watchfulness that we do not cut off the entail of religion, lose the truest hereditary honours, and expose ourselves to the displeasure and contempt of the most High. Let us observe,

II. *Young persons often forsake the religion of their fathers, through pride, and love of elegance, pomp, and show.*

This was the case of Jehoiakim. He must have a fine house, a stately palace, elegantly painted, curiously wainscoted; so that he was, as the text expresseth it, "closed in cedar." It seems very probable, from the expostulation in the text, concerning his father Josiah, that (as Mr. Henry conjectures) "this vain young prince had spoken scornfully of his father, for contenting himself with a mean, inconvenient dwelling, below the grandeur of a sovereign prince; and ridiculed him as one that had a dull fancy, a low spirit, and could not find in his heart to lay out his money." He was determined that that should not serve him which served his father. But this language and conduct were founded in pride, which led him, not only to neglect his duty as a king, but to be unjust, tyrannical, and oppressive. No doubt it is lawful for persons of rank and fortune to build themselves houses and to adorn and beautify them; provided it be suitable to their circumstances, and no injury to justice or

charity. But it was pride, that led Jehoiakim to covet so much splendour, and practise so much injustice. This is a sin that easily besets the young, and often leads them to forsake the ways and the God of their fathers. Therefore a caution against it may be necessary and salutary. Young persons often think that their fathers had a low, vulgar taste. They are not content with such houses, furniture, and dress, as their ancestors were. They must have more servants, finer clothes, richer furniture, more elegant entertainments, and a larger acquaintance. This is often the case with young tradesmen. They set out beyond their rank and circumstances, and begin where their wiser fathers ended. And this their pride and vanity leads them to forsake the religious profession and the religious practices of their fathers. It often leads them to forsake the religious profession of their fathers. Thus Jehoiakim, it is probable, turned idolater. He forsook the God of Israel, and persecuted his faithful prophets. Hence so many among us forsake the principles and profession of their ancestors; because the favour and preferments of the world and public fashion are not on that side. If there be wealth and grandeur in any alliance proposed for themselves or their children, religion is often put out of the question; and present views have a greater influence upon them, than a regard to their profession, or their own or their children's souls. Because their fathers might be stiff and bigoted, they run into the other extreme, and show great indifference to any principles, or any profession; if so be their grandeur may be supported and increased, and their vanity gratified. But this is not the worst of the case. Pride and love of pomp and elegance lead many to forsake the religious practices of their fathers, and to part with the life and power of godliness. These lead them into luxury and extravagance, and take up so much of their time, that they have no leisure to attend to the concerns of religion with that seriousness and diligence which their importance demands. These also consume their substance, that they cannot "do justice and judgment," as their fathers did. They live beyond their income; contract debts which they cannot pay; or delay payment beyond what justice and honour require. Or, with Jehoiakim, they "use their neighbours' service without wages, and give them not for their work" (v. 13). Their luxury necessarily prevents their being charitable; so that they cannot "judge the cause of the poor and needy," enter into their cases, and afford them relief, as their fathers did. Their desire of living genteelly, and doing what they call handsome things, and exceeding others, hinders the exercise of benevolent dispositions. Their luxury multiplies their wants, so that theirs are more numerous than those of their fathers; and therefore they cannot spare for good works, as they did. This pride and love of show engage their spirits also; so that they have

little inclination to religious exercises, and are quite indisposed for meditation and serious thoughts. By these dispositions they are led to court a large acquaintance. The consequence of this is, their expenses are increased; their precious time wasted; their trade, their shops, and their own houses neglected; their closets unfrequented; and the house of God often forsaken. By pride and love of elegancies many are led to be very fond of the acquaintance of persons of high rank, or what is called polite company; and out of complaisance, they take care never to carry their religion into such company, but suit themselves to their taste. Thus they do what they inwardly disapprove, and omit those duties which their consciences tell them they ought to discharge. Through fear of displeasing their acquaintance, or having their politeness and good manners called in question, they will neglect religious services, make free with the Lord's day, and treat the God of heaven with the greatest ill manners. Further, this introduceth the practice of gaming, which makes terrible inroads upon charity and justice, consumes much time, which should be employed better, gives the mind a bad turn, and strengthens that "love of money, which is the root of all evil." Thus they are led into practices and compliances which their fathers would have abhorred. The power of religion is lessened; the means of it neglected; and fear of sin, and tenderness of conscience, are in a great measure lost. Thus the degenerate son in the text went from bad to worse; so that he oppressed Jeremiah, one faithful prophet, and put another to death, because he had reproved him, even Urijah, Jer. xxvi. 21, &c. He was guilty of "oppression and violence," and "shed innocent blood;" and "his eyes and his heart" were set upon such abominable practices; as we are told in the verse following the text. He is also described by the prophet Ezekiel, as "a young lion, who learned to catch the prey and devoured men," who, as a great oppressor, "laid waste the cities and made the land desolate," Ezek. xix. 6, 7. Let me therefore caution all, and especially young persons, against that pride, and love of pomp and elegance, which are attended with such pernicious consequences. Set out in life, my young friends, with moderate desires, wishes, and expectations. Be content with your rank and station. Endeavour to cultivate and strengthen religious principles and dispositions. Never compliment any at the expense of truth and conscience. Thus you will be able "to do justice and mercy," and will retain that stedfastness in religion which is true politeness, and improve in that humility which is the brightest ornament. As a motive to this, I add, as another observation from the text,

III. *It is a great dishonour and reproach to any to forsake the good ways of their fathers.*

This is plainly suggested by the manner in which God here expostulates with Jehoiakim. He tells him, in effect, that he knew what his father Josiah's temper and practice were. Indeed he could not but know this, for he was above twenty years of age when his father died. And God intimates to him, that his forsaking his father's steps was very dishonourable, quite inexcusable, and an aggravation of his wickedness. It is generally reckoned dishonourable, and indeed it is so, for children to forsake the religious profession of their fathers; unless, upon serious and impartial examination, they find that it hath been wrong, contrary to scripture, and not so well adapted to Christian edification. But to throw up their religious practices is undoubtedly dishonourable, and entails lasting infamy upon them, in the judgment of God and all good men. Many young persons, through pride and thoughtlessness, cast off their fathers' real excellencies with their old fashions and manner of living, and forsake the God of their fathers. No doubt Josiah, who was zealous for the God and for the reformation of Israel, would take good care of the education of his own children; and that this young prince did not improve it was his reproach. Those who have taught the good ways of God, and been trained up in his fear and service, get a lasting dishonour by forsaking them. The good instructions they have received from their parents, and the good examples they have seen in them, aggravate their guilt and shame. Having fully known their manner of life, their devotion, purity, temperance, patience, charity, and love to God's house and ordinances, they must act a very mean and scandalous part, if they neglect these virtues, and show themselves blind to the lustre of such good examples. How justly may such be expostulated with, as Jehoiakim was in the text? Did thy father, young man, do justice and judgment, and assist the poor and needy? Was he sober, diligent, grave, and devout? And will it be to thy credit to be giddy, dishonest, idle, extravagant, and an associate with rakes and sots? Did thy mother, young woman, fill up her place honourably? Was she active, prudent, serious, and good tempered? Did she sanctify God's sabbath, and labour to keep thee from pride and levity, and dangerous acquaintance? And wilt thou forget all this, and run into every fashionable folly? Will this be for thy reputation and comfort? Let young persons consider the usefulness and honour for which their parents were eminent. God remembers this, and they should not forget it. Did not they do good in their places, and was it not "well with them?" Were they not esteemed and beloved? Do they not yet live creditably; or if they are dead, did they not die comfortably, and leave an honourable remembrance behind them? Were they not much lamented by their relations "saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah my sister!" and by their neighbours and acquaintance, "saying,

Ah lord ! or, Ah his glory !" (v. 18,) which the prophet foretells should not be the case of this young apostate. And wilt thou lose that character which they supported, and forfeit the credit and honour which they enjoyed ? Let it be farther considered, for what it is, that so many forsake the good ways of their fathers ; and see whether the exchange will be to their honour. Is it not for the love of money, the love of pleasure, or the acquaintance and esteem of persons who have few or no good qualities, persons whom their wiser fathers would have despised, and would have scorned to have been known for their acquaintance ? And will this be to your honour in the esteem of God ? Will this afford you comfort in the latter end, or secure veneration for your memory after your death ? You must know and acknowledge, if conscience be allowed to speak, that it will not. But there is a more weighty thought than this, yet to be urged ; and that is, if you act thus, you will forfeit the favour of God. There are terrible threatenings, in the context and other places of this prophecy, against this wicked Jehoiakim. All his wealth, pomp, and power could not shield him from the judgments of God. A few years after this prophecy, the king of Babylon seized him, and bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon ; but, being released upon his promise of allegiance, he afterwards rebelled, was slain in a sally out of Jerusalem, and was "buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (v. 19), and had no child "to sit upon the throne of David," 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6 ; Jer. xxxvi. 30. If you forsake the religion of your pious ancestors, it will be to your shame. Your consciences will reproach you with their wise choice and regular conduct, as well as with your own ingratitude, baseness, and folly. And your guilt and condemnation will be increased, by the many uncommon and glorious advantages which you have enjoyed. A very judicious and pious divine, who had long made careful observations upon mankind, declared that he had scarce known a single instance of the degenerate child of a very holy man, but some signal mark of the divine displeasure was fixed upon him in this world ; so that all wise observers might see it and say, "This is an apostate." In order that you may escape such a series of dreadful evils, let me call upon you to "know the God of your fathers, and to serve him with upright hearts and willing minds ;" to consider what was just, pure, amiable, lovely, and of good report in them ; to think of these things, and practise them : for "if thou seek God, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." To excite you to this pious care, to excite you all to be religious, let me entreat your further attention to the last observation from the text, which is this,

IV. *The way of religion is the way of wisdom, honour, and happiness.*

This thought is evidently suggested in the text, by the encomiums which the great God, the unerring judge of worth and excellency, passeth upon good Josiah.

1. The way of religion is the way of wisdom. Jehoiakim thought himself very wise, and very secure and happy, because he had built him a fine strong house. But God tells him that he was deceiving himself. Thy father was a good man and a good king: and "was not this to know me? saith the Lord," He showed that he had a right knowledge of God, of his perfections and providence, because he was religious. And indeed none are truly wise, but who are truly good. "The fear of the Lord," saith David, "is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments," Ps. cxi. 10. With this the New Testament agreeth. "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John ii. 3, 4. Many think themselves wiser than their good fathers; and perhaps they may have juster notions of religion, and be more free from superstition and enthusiasm. Yet, "while they profess to know God," they may "in works deny him," and "love the praise of man more than the praise of God." And thus they prove that they are not so wise as their fathers. For right knowledge consists in being religious, and faithfully performing the duties of our several stations. "Is not this to know me? saith the Lord."

2. The way of religion is also the way of honour. This I have hinted at, under the former observation, concerning the reproach of forsaking this way. Josiah was universally esteemed while living, and much lamented when dead. The prophet Jeremiah lamented for him. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him, and "made them an ordinance in Israel," that his remembrance should be kept up by some annual form of lamentation, 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. Luxury and extravagance, splendour and show, are not the way to be truly honourable. Many admire and compliment persons who are remarkable for these, while yet they inwardly despise them. The just, the generous, the friendly man, he who is strictly religious, and soberly singular, and who studies to do good to others, though he hath a mean house, and dresseth and liveth plain, this man will be held in reputation. One who lived in as grand a house and as much splendour as any man ever did, and was withal wiser than any man, hath told us, and let us attend to his remark, "Forget not the law, but keep the commandment; and let mercy and truth never forsake thee. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man," Prov. iii. 3, 4. Once more,

3. The way of religion is the way of happiness. It is the way to enjoy prosperity, and to have comfort in it. It is the way to enjoy prosperity. "Did not thy father do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?" He repeats it again as a weighty thought, a powerful motive; "Then it was well with him." This young prince thought himself safe and happy, because he had a stately and strong house. But, saith God, "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar?" Will thy fine house be a castle to protect thee? No; thy father had a firmer foundation, a surer defence, even his piety and righteousness. God blessed him with prosperity. "It was well with him," and with his subjects. And his violent death, though it might appear at first a mark of God's displeasure, was intended as a token of his favour; for "he was taken away from the evil to come." Religion hath a favourable aspect on worldly prosperity. Piety, diligence, temperance, chastity, and moderation, have a good influence on the body, the mind, and the estate. By cultivating these graces we shall enjoy comfort in what we possess. "Did not thy father eat and drink?" Had he not a sufficiency for himself; yea enough to be hospitable and charitable with? or, (as that expression rather signifies) had he not comfort in the enjoyments of life? Did he not live cheerfully, without distracting cares, and disquieting fears? And will not this be our case, brethren, if we are truly religious? Shall we not thus have much satisfaction in our enjoyments? Whatever our substance is, it will be a pleasure to us to think that it hath been honestly gained, that it hath not been penuriously hoarded, nor extravagantly squandered, nor abused to sensual purposes, but that we have been charitable, sober, and thankful. Thus we shall secure the blessing of God upon what we have, and enjoy good in our labours and possessions. And it will afford us great comfort in the recollection, that we have "done justice, and loved mercy, and walked humbly" and thankfully with our God.

Upon the whole, the way to be happy is to be good. Thus we shall shine in substantial honours, and enjoy rational and divine pleasures. While we do well, it will certainly be well with us. If our views extended no further than the present life, it is our wisdom and interest to be stedfastly religious. But when we consider ourselves as in a state of trial for another world, and that our future state will be either happy or miserable for ever, according to our present behaviour, it must be the greatest folly and madness to neglect religion, to sacrifice it to any thing else, or not to make it the main business of our lives. "What man, therefore, is he that desireth life and would see good days," that would be truly wise, eminently honourable, and eternally blessed? "let him depart from evil, and do good;" for "godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

DISCOURSE XX.

THE INCONVENIENCY AND DANGER OF PERSONS BEING LONG
OR FREQUENTLY ABSENT FROM HOME.

PROV. XXVII. 8.

*As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that
wandereth from his place.*

It is an observation of an ancient Jewish writer, in the Apocrypha, and it is confirmed and sealed by the ruin of thousands, that "he that despiseth small things, shall fall by little and little," Eccclus. xix. 1. This important remark is applicable to the affairs both of this world and of another. There are multitudes ruined for this world, by not calculating the amount of small expenses, and by throwing away small parcels of time. There are multitudes ruined for another world, by allowing themselves some indulgences, which prudence should restrain; and by neglecting a religious care of themselves and their families, in some instances which appear to them of little moment. Whereas nothing that affects our religious interests can, properly speaking, be called little. Every thing that can influence the present temper and future state of the soul, is weighty and important. Some things are indeed necessary to the very being of religion; others are ornamental to it, and perhaps necessary to promote our progress in it, and give it credit and esteem in the world; and to despise these is the way to lose all that we have gained, to contract bad habits, and by degrees to become loose and abandoned. I would now apply these general remarks concerning the danger of despising small things, to one particular instance; namely, that of persons neglecting their proper business and wandering from home. This is the evil which Solomon points at in the text; where he observeth, "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." This remark and sentiment may appear indeed to some of no great moment, and scarcely worthy of their serious regard. Yet I hope the authority of the wisest of men will concur with what shall be said for the illustration of it, to convince them to the contrary. Some interpret the words as a caution against quitting a station in which persons are fixed; leaving any country where they are settled; any trade or office in which they are employed: leaving these rashly, and without attending to their conveniences as well as their inconveniences. As this frequently ariseth from an unsettled, discontented spirit, such persons seldom mend their condition; but in every place and occupation will be likely to meet with the same difficulties or greater, and be exposed to many new inconveniences, which they did not expect. It is indeed a

maxim of great prudence not hastily to quit that place or station in which providence hath fixed us. The apostle Paul warns against this, when he saith, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called," 1 Cor. vii. 20, "abide with God," as he afterwards expresseth it, or continue to act faithfully in it, as in the presence of God. But there seems no reason for confining Solomon's remark to this instance of prudence and duty. I apprehend that he cautions against a rambling disposition in general; and it is justly applicable to the case of those who, though they do not quit the country or station in which they are fixed, yet are frequently absent from their proper place, and do not pay a becoming attention to the duties of their stations and callings. And this interpretation best suits the comparison in the former part of the text. The words will therefore afford us this useful observation,

That it is very inconvenient and dangerous for a person to be long, or often, absent from home.

"A bird that wandereth from her nest" leaves her eggs unhatched, or starves her young ones, or exposeth them to be destroyed by many creatures, whom she hath strength to resist, and from whom, had she been near, she might have fled to defend them, Isa. xxxi. 5. She hath no opportunity of exercising that astonishing art and sagacity, which many birds have, to deceive those who approach their nests, as they suppose, with an intention to plunder and destroy them; and lead them to believe that they are in some other place. Besides this injury to her nest, she herself is exposed to birds of prey, and the arts of the fowler, which she might have escaped, had she stayed on or near her nest, or quickly returned to it. A lively emblem of that danger into which men run, when they are needlessly absent from home! Every person hath a proper place or station in life, and some business to do, which requireth his attention and diligence. Every person hath also some connexions with others; from whence arise certain duties, which ought to be discharged. There are various employments in life which frequently call those who are engaged in them from home; and they are in the way of their duty, while thus absent from their families and stations. It is also necessary sometimes, by way of relaxation and amusement, to change our place and company; for man was formed for society, and not to live recluse, and without converse with others. To confine his converse to one or two relations or intimate friends, is restraining his benevolence and pleasure within narrow bounds, and withholding those services which he might be doing to multitudes. Such a conduct would be dishonourable to religion, and injurious to his own character; as it would be judged to proceed from pride or ill-nature, or a want of benevolence and humanity. But the contrary seems to be

the extreme of the present day ; and therefore I would caution you against it. I would address the caution especially to masters and mistresses of families, and to those who have any particular occupations in life ; that they do not wander from their place ; or, in other words, that they be not long and often absent from home. The evil consequences of which are these : they who wander from home lose many of the comforts of relative life ; their domestic affairs suffer ; a great deal of precious time is lost ; they are exposed to many temptations ; and it is especially a great hindrance to family religion.

1. They who wander from home lose many relative comforts. Real love should be the foundation of every relation into which we enter by choice ; and it should be found in every natural relation. As there can be no rational pleasure in any relation of life without love, constant care should be taken to cherish, strengthen, and increase it. Now nothing will be so likely to do this as frequent converse, and a constant series of kind offices mutually exchanged. These cement friendship and give relations a higher esteem and affection for each other, especially as they tend to their common advantage. Where persons unnecessarily wander abroad, and seem to think any place more agreeable than home, their relations there can scarcely help suspecting, that they want that affection to them, which is desirable, and which they probably deserve. The natural consequence of such a suspicion is, that their own affection cools and decays. Hence proceed shyness and disgust. Whereas the enjoyment of each other's company, and thereby discerning the excellency of some qualities and dispositions which appear in proportion to intimacy, will increase respect and delight. Again, persons who are much at home are free from seeing and hearing certain occurrences that may give them uneasiness ; this they sometimes bring home with them, and spread it through the whole family, and so embitter the comfort of it. A heathen philosopher observes, that "wanderers about have many acquaintance, but few friends."* Thus, as a means to render life comfortable, amidst the various vanities that attend it, Solomon gives this advice : "Eat thy bread with joy, drink thy wine with a merry heart ; and live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest," Eccl. ix. 9, and endeavour that nothing may interrupt the cheerfulness.

2. The domestic affairs of wanderers greatly suffer. David describes it as part of the character of a good man, that "he guideth his affairs with discretion," Ps. cxii. 5. He reflects beforehand what will be the consequence of his schemes and actions. Solomon often exhorts men to be diligent in their business, to rise early, to apply closely to their proper work. He exhorts the husbandman, for instance, to "be diligent to know

* Seneca.

the state of his flocks, and to look well to his herds," Prov. xxvi. 23. When persons are absent from home, their work often stands still, or goes on very indifferently. If a tradesman accustoms himself to leave his shop or counting-house, to frequent ale-houses, or even keep what may be called good company; if he is ready to go out with every idle person that calls on him; to join every party of pleasure; to pursue some unprofitable amusement; he is in the likely way to come to poverty. If he is no where to be found, when customers want him, or is gone abroad when he should be at his post, they will think themselves neglected, have a very ill opinion of his prudence and attention, and decline having any dealings with him. While the master is absent, the servants are often idle, or nod over their work. They have opportunities to steal and defraud, or spend their master's time with company as slothful and dissolute as themselves. Whereas, if masters would be more at home, and would work themselves, when their business will permit it, or overlook what is going on, it would have a happy influence both on the skill and the diligence of their apprentices; and indeed this is but justice to those whom they have engaged to teach their trade. Many inconveniences arise, when mistresses of families are fond of visiting and wandering about; particularly when they leave their families in an evening and stay out late at night; but more especially when they fall into the pernicious practice of frequenting the play-house and public assemblies. Thus waste and confusion enter into their houses, and they lay before their servants temptations to be idle and extravagant. It is part of the character of the virtuous woman, that "she provideth meat for her family; that she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness," Prov. xxxi. 15. 27. A caution upon this head is especially proper for young tradesmen and housekeepers. Peculiar diligence in their affairs, frugality in their expenses, and solicitude to oblige others, are necessary for them, if they would thrive in the world, and live honourably and comfortably. Let me add, under this head, that it is particularly inconvenient for the master and mistress of a family to be abroad together for any long time; and there ought to be peculiar care, that one should attend to domestic concerns while the other is necessarily absent on account of business or health. Solomon represents it as the character of a bad wife, that "her feet abide not in her house. Now she is without, now in the streets;" though "the good man was not at home, but gone a long journey," Prov. vii. 11, 12. On the contrary, he observeth concerning the virtuous woman, that "the heart of her husband safely trusteth in her, while he is absent from home, and he shall have no need of spoil" to enrich himself, Prov. xxxi. 11.

3. A great deal of precious time is lost by wandering from

home. There are very few who are sufficiently sensible of the value of time, and of the strict account which will at last be demanded, how it hath been employed. There are many who are obliged to go abroad upon their lawful business, yet they stay much longer than is needful. They trifle at every place where they come, and must chat with every person who hath as little prudence as themselves. There are many who need frequent relaxations for their health, but think that an excuse for taking more than they need ; till the fatigue injures them more than the relaxation profits them. Thus a trifling, indolent habit is contracted. If persons' necessary business doth not require constant application, they have important works of other kinds to apply themselves to; as reading, meditating, praying ; visiting the sick, helping their neighbours, and the like. No one who is truly wise and thoughtful will find time hang heavy on his hands, or want sauntering and amusement to kill it. Yet how many hours are spent by heads of families and persons in business, of which they can give no good account ! Had these hours been faithfully redeemed, it would have tended to the increase of their substance, or the improvement of their minds, or the comfort of their families, or the advantage of the public. It is seldom that persons can find useful employment any where but at home, and when engaged in their proper business.

4. Wanderers are exposed to many temptations which ought to be avoided. The apostle Paul observes concerning the young women, and I hope they will attend to his remark, that they are in danger of " learning to be idle, wandering about from house to house;" and the consequence of that love of visiting and wandering is, that " they become tâtlers also and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not," 1 Tim. v. 13. When persons wander from home they become a prey to Satan ; they are often seduced by vile and worthless men, and led to drink to excess or to game. Those who are very fond of company and visiting, for want of heads or hearts for better conversation, rake into the character of their neighbours, become slanderers and false accusers, and speak evil of others. Hence tea-table scandal is become a proverb, and thousands of characters are daily sacrificed upon that altar. By frequent wandering about, persons contract a disinclination to labour ; they have no heart to their work, and they are weary with a few minutes' application. They also do injury to others, by drawing off their diligent neighbours from their business, or furnishing inferiors with an excuse for indolence and wandering. " When persons are fond of cultivating a large acquaintance, are taken up in collecting and retailing news, rambling from place to place, from company to company, pleased to be any where rather than at home, employed about any thing rather than their own business, and to converse with any per-

sons rather than themselves, it hath a very ill aspect on their temporal affairs; but it is next to impossible they should improve in the knowledge of God and their own hearts, or that the other world should gain upon their affections, when their time is almost all devoted to the pleasures and avocations of this.”* Once more,

5. Wandering from home is a great hindrance to family religion. Every house ought to be a church, in which religious instruction should be given to the family, and religious worship paid to God every morning and evening. Every Christian family should be a nursery for heaven. But how can this be the case, where the members of it, especially the heads, wander about, spend their evenings from home, and tarry at their visits or diversions till almost midnight, or past it? The consequence of this is, that family duty is entirely neglected, or hurried over in a cold, formal, sleepy manner. It is also shortened, and reading the scriptures and singing the praises of God are quite omitted. In consequence of heads of families lying long in bed, which is much the same as being abroad, the servants are obliged to be in the shop or abroad at their work, and the children at school, before family duty is performed; or if they keep late hours, the young branches of their families are in bed before the season of worship, or, which is worse, asleep at it. Further, in families where religious worship is daily used, there are, I fear, few mistresses who will perform that service when their husbands are abroad, though it is evidently their duty; which is another reason why the caution in the text should be attended to by masters of families. Another reason of this kind is, men in business, mechanics, and labourers, seldom have leisure, except in an evening, to hear their children read, and to converse with them upon useful subjects, in order to improve their understandings and their tempers. This ought to be part of their daily employment; therefore they should very seldom spend their evenings abroad. Needless absence from home, and a neglect of having fixed hours for family worship, as there are for meals, throw all into confusion. “Good orders in a household, and regular hours for all the duties and engagements of life, give beauty and ornament to life itself. Such a family appears like a Bethel, a house of God, and the Lord himself delights to dwell in it.”† These are the chief inconveniences and bad consequences of persons being long and often absent from home. They lose many relative comforts; their domestic affairs greatly suffer; much precious time is lost; they are exposed to many temptations which ought to have been avoided; and it is a great hindrance to family religion. Let me add some inferences and advices grounded upon this subject.

* Grove.

† Watts.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us all apply these thoughts to ourselves, and inquire how far we are concerned in this admonition.* I know that the circumstances or occupations of many call them frequently abroad; but I would entreat such carefully and uprightly to inquire, as in the sight of God, whether they are not *oftener* and *longer* from their families than need requires? Whether it be their care, when necessarily called abroad, to return home as soon as possible? Whether, for instance, some who are obliged frequently to attend fairs and markets, return to their houses so soon as they ought? Whether they are not too inquisitive about news and trifles, and often tempted to sit drinking in company, sometimes I fear to excess, when they should be at their proper work? Whether some who are obliged to attend meetings about trade or other important concerns, or to call upon their neighbours in the way of business, do not stay longer than the business requireth, and so waste their own time and that of others, and expose themselves to many temptations? Let the female part of my hearers inquire whether those visits, which custom hath rendered necessary to civility and good neighbourhood, are not too frequent, too long, and too late? And whether they do not often see this by finding, not only mismanagement at home, but their own spirits less fit for meditation and devotion, or perhaps utterly unfit for them? These are not small evils, brethren, whatever you may apprehend; and they will “increase unto more ungodliness;” and, by degrees, you will become triflers for this world and another. I exhort you all, therefore, to be upon your guard against such irregularities. I must add another important caution under this head. It is much to be feared that frequent meetings on week days, for hearing occasional sermons, for prayer, conference, and other exercises of the religious kind, are little better than solemn trifling. And I have known some to whom those words might justly be applied, “Ye are idle, ye are idle; therefore ye say, Let us go and sacrifice to our God,” Exod. v. 17. Thus many are called off from their proper business; and those who are most zealous for these exercises do, and must, shamefully neglect the duties of their families and callings, and, therefore, cannot please the God of order. While others, who, from conscience towards God, seldom attend them, but sanctify the sabbath, daily and regularly perform family worship, social duties, and the business of their proper stations, are approved in his sight, and even by judicious and serious Christians, and do much more honour to religion. “Every thing is beautiful in its season.” Let us all endeavour to cultivate a diligent, active spirit; to have the utmost regularity and good order in our families, that we may adorn the Christian doctrine, be honour-

able in the eyes of the world, find every religious habit strengthening, see all about us regular and sober, and at length rise to the well-ordered family in heaven.

2. *It is of importance for young people to cultivate a habit of staying at home.* Some diversions and relaxations are necessary for children and youth. But it is a very ill sign, if they are never easy but when abroad or at play; if they are uneasy and out of temper when they are confined at home, to work or to read. It is an instance of parental wisdom to restrain children from such excesses; remembering that they are otherwise contracting a bad habit, which it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to cure. The necessary confinement to which they must submit when they go abroad into the world, to school, or to be servants and apprentices, will be peculiarly grievous to them. Parents should endeavour to find some various, and, as far as may be, agreeable employments for their children at home, to prevent their becoming wild, idle, and untractable. I must caution the younger women also upon this head; that they restrain their love of company and diversions, and keep it within due bounds; that they may have time to be helpful to their parents, to contribute to the welfare and order of the family, and to improve their own hearts. Frequenting public places and assemblies, multiplied as they are, hath this ill effect, among many others, that it maketh home irksome; and thereby such rambles expose themselves to many dangers and temptations, as well as to the contempt of the wise and the sober. Those are likely to make very bad wives and mistresses of families, and to have very disorderly houses, whose single state is so very irregular and disorderly. I exhort such therefore, in the language of the apostle, "to be discreet and chaste;" and in order to that, "to be keepers at home;" or as the original is, "lovers of their own houses; that the word of God be not blasphemed," Titus ii. 5.

3. *It is peculiarly bad in servants to wander from their place.* For, besides the other evils attend it, as mentioned above, it is in them injustice and infidelity. Their time is their master's; and for them to be gadding about, when they should be at their work, taking care of the families where they live, and some way or other promoting the interests of them, is very wicked in the sight of God: it is a violation of his law, as well as dishonest to those that hire them. To spend an hour or two on an errand which might be despatched in a few minutes; to be curious to know every thing relating to the town and neighbourhood and to tell it again, diverts them from their business, and makes them unfaithful to God and man. Their work is neglected; their masters and mistresses are justly displeased; and, as a consequence of this idle trifling spirit, uneasiness and differences arise in families, and the peace and comfort of them is destroyed.

I exhort servants therefore, in the language of the apostle, that they be "obedient to their own masters; endeavouring to please them well in all things; doing service heartily as to the Lord; not with eye-service; and showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," Col. iii. 23; Titus ii. 10.* We may infer,

4. *Relations should endeavour to make home agreeable to one another.* This would prevent many of the evils which I have been reproving. Let husbands, for instance, as St. Paul exhorts, "love their wives, and not be bitter against them," and tyrannize over them, Col. iii. 19. Let wives be careful that they do not make home disagreeable to their husbands, by an angry peevish, and fretful spirit. This is, according to Solomon's beautiful similitude just after the text, "like a continual dropping in a rainy day." When a man's wife is contentious, it is as when his house raineth in; he cannot stay at home with comfort or quiet. Let this then, to use the words of the poet,

This be the female dignity and praise,
To give society its highest taste;
Well order'd home, man's best delight to make,
And sweeten all the toils of human life.†

Let parents endeavour to be agreeable companions to their children, and not, by a tyrannical, austere behaviour, lead them to hate home; or create such an awe and terror in them, as shall make them prefer any company to that of their parents. Let masters and mistresses treat their servants kindly, and not "make their lives bitter by hard bondage," Exod. i. 14, or re-

* Shall I be allowed, in this connexion, to hint to the ministers of the gospel, who are more immediately the servants of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, how much it is their duty to be peculiarly sollicitous that they do not wander from their place, nor ever leave their studies and flocks but when it is quite necessary? Great caution and resolution are needful, especially for young ministers, that they attend to their proper duties; and decline, as far as possible, all invitations which may divert them from the faithful discharge of them. Nothing can be more contemptible in the character of a minister, than a readiness to be, as one emphatically expresseth it, the make-weight of every company. Those who seem most fond of the agreeable companion, will despise the divine. Let me enforce this important caution by the example of that learned, judicious, and eminently pious minister, Mr. Abernethy. His biographer saith, "Mr. Abernethy did not go much into mixed company, when the business of his station did not call him to it." He often said, "As conversation was conducted, he had little satisfaction in it." He therefore stayed much at home, and applied himself to study. This was not owing to any thing sour or unsocial in his temper; for he had a taste for conversation, and was of a most cheerful as well as affectionate spirit; but to a persuasion, that most of the time spent in company was lost, at least might be much better employed. He was persuaded that when a habit of passing time in a trifling manner was contracted, it must have a bad effect upon the mind; unbending it too much, and begetting an indolence, by which men were rendered averse to application, and in some measure incapable of it. He thought that, of all men, ministers had most reason to guard against this; as it was more particularly their duty to preserve the mind always in an aptitude for the best exercises, and to avoid every thing which has a tendency to dissipate the vigour of it; observing likewise, that where the taste of the company was such that they could not manage conversation so as to render it worthy men of sense and good affections, that dignity of character, which they ought always carefully to maintain, must suffer by it." Abernethy's Post. Sermon. v. i. pref. p. 79.

† Thomson.

proachful and insulting words. Let all relations, and others who live together, study to render themselves agreeable to each other; that they may take pleasure in one another's company; "that home may be the place of their principal delight, and that they may never occasionally quit it, without finding the pleasure of returning to it increased in proportion to the time of their absence from it." We infer from the whole,

5. *How bad must it be to wander from the house of God.* We are all members of God's family. We are by profession his children and servants. As immortal creatures his house is our home in this world. There are stated seasons of attending it. There every one hath, or should have a place. Every good man "loveth the habitation of God's house." When we are necessarily detained from it, we should earnestly desire and long to return, saying, "When shall I come and appear before God?" To wander from his house, to "forsake the assembling of yourselves together," is dishonourable and affronting to him. It is unjust, unkind, and discouraging to Christian ministers. It is injurious to yourselves; losing all the advantages of public worship and instruction. It is weakening the credit of religion; setting a bad example before others; and disqualifying you for the business and blessedness of God's upper family in heaven. To this I would add that it is the duty of Christians statedly and regularly to attend their own place of worship, or with that society of Christians, to which they have thought it right to join themselves. This is, on many accounts, an important duty. It is an act of respect, and indeed of justice to their pastors, and an encouragement to them in their work. It is setting a good example before their families and fellow-Christians. It is the way to gain a clearer knowledge of the truths and duties of the gospel, and to become judicious and established Christians. Thus likewise they are most likely to obtain the assistance and blessing of God, "who is not the author of confusion, but of order and peace." Whereas they who are frequently "wandering from their place," from one place of worship to another, to indulge their curiosity, gratify their love of novelty and variety, and "please their itching ears," 2 Tim. iv. 3, grow wise in their own conceits. They become fond of talking and disputing about religious sentiments, contract a censorious spirit, and defeat the great end of preaching and all divine ordinances. It was a clause in the covenant, which Nehemiah and the Israelites made, after their return from Babylon, "We will not forsake the house of our God," Neh. x. 29. Let us make this resolution and keep it; often expressing our regard to the solemn assembly in the devout language of David, with which I conclude; "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire his will in his temple," Ps. xxvii. 4.

DISCOURSE XXI.

AN HABITUAL REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST RECOMMENDED.

2 TIMOTHY II. 8.

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to my gospel.

THE apostle Peter represents it as the design of both his epistles, to “stir up the pure minds” of Christians “by way of remembrance,” 2 Pet. iii. 1. The purest minds need to be thus stirred up; and it is the business of Christian ministers to endeavour, that those whom they address may have the great truths and duties of religion always in their remembrance. I would therefore this day, brethren, remind you of him, of whom, if you are Christians indeed, you love to hear, and whose gospel is a doctrine according to godliness. I would call upon you to remember Jesus Christ your Lord and Saviour, and address you in the language of the text. The apostle Paul’s design in this epistle was to animate his son Timothy to all the duties, and encourage him under all the difficulties and sufferings, of the Christian life and ministerial office. Among other directions and motives for this purpose, he exhorts him in the text (as we render it) to “remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to his gospel.” But I think, instead of confining his views to the resurrection of Christ, an event which it was hardly possible for Timothy to forget, the apostle intends it as a more general precept, and it would be better rendered, “Remember Jesus Christ of the seed of David, who was raised from the dead according to my gospel.” In this view it appears a precept of great extent and general use, and if it were duly regarded, would be as serviceable as any single precept in the New Testament, to promote the life of religion in our souls. My business will be, in a few words,

I. To illustrate the exhortation; and then,

II. To enforce it; or urge upon you and myself a serious, habitual remembrance of Jesus Christ, and give you my best assistance, in order to your maintaining it.

I. *I am to illustrate the exhortation, to remember Jesus Christ.*

Now this supposeth some acquaintance with him; for we cannot with any propriety be called upon to remember what we know nothing of. It supposeth that we have been instructed in the principles of his gospel, and know his history in the general. This may reasonably be taken for granted, considering that we make profession of his religion, have the New Testament in our hands, and attend Christian worship. To remember Jesus

Christ, is to keep up an habitual remembrance of him; not merely to recollect him, and think of him now and then, at some solemn seasons, as on the Lord's day, and when we attend on the Lord's Supper; but to maintain, as far as may be, a constant remembrance of him. We are, as the apostle exhorts, to "consider Jesus Christ, the apostle and high priest of our profession," Heb. iii. 1, to fix our thoughts upon him, and apply the mind to a close, affectionate contemplation of him. In order to this, it is our duty to enlarge our acquaintance with him; "to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ;" to account all other knowledge as trifling, as loss, when compared with the excellent knowledge of Christ. What we know of him, we are to think of, and make it so familiar to the mind that it may easily and often occur. We are to enter closely into his character and offices, his doctrines and commands, his promises and threatenings; to view him carefully in the several lights in which he is represented in scripture, and to keep always in mind the ideas which are there given of him; and more especially, when we join in public worship, or pray to our Father in secret. But, as our text directs us, we are particularly to remember him as "the seed of David;" a descendant of that royal house; as the promised Messiah; fulfilling that prophecy of Isaiah, "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. In him shall the gentiles trust, and his rest shall be glorious," Isa. xi. 1, 10; Rom. xv. 12. We are to remember him, as "Jesus" the Saviour; as "Christ," the anointed of the Lord; to whom all the prophets bore witness; who completely answered the character and description they gave of him, and whom the Jews expected. We are likewise to remember that he died. This is pre-supposed, when the apostle speaks of his being raised from the dead. We are to keep in remembrance what death he died, even the painful, shameful death of the cross; and for what ends he died, namely, to attest and confirm the truth and divine authority of his doctrine; to set us an example of obedience and patience; but more especially, to make an atonement for our sins, remove the obstructions which were in the way of our obtaining pardon and acceptance with God, to manifest the evil of sin, the justice and the grace of God, and to obtain everlasting salvation for us. We are likewise seriously to remember and consider, that he was "raised from the dead;" that God did not "leave him in the grave, nor suffer his holy one to see corruption;" but on the third day raised him up, having loosed the bonds of death, and afterwards received him to glory. We are to remember the circumstances that did honour to his resurrection; the earthquake, the descent of the angels, and the resurrection of some saints with him. We are to keep in mind the abundant evidence we have of his resurrection; in the testimony of the guards, of the

women ; especially of the apostles and many Christians, who saw him alive by many infallible proofs, conversed with him forty days, and confirmed the truth of their testimony by many glorious miracles. All this St Paul exhorts Timothy to remember, “according to his gospel,” that is, the gospel of Christ, which St. Paul preached : the substance of which is, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, that he died for our sins and rose again for our justification ; to give us the clearest evidence that there is another life after this, and that all faithful Christians shall be raised from the dead, and inherit eternal life. Thus, my brethren, are we to remember Jesus Christ, especially these important particulars relating to him, and endeavour to have them familiar to our minds. I am

II. *To enforce this exhortation,*

Or urge upon you and myself a serious habitual remembrance of Christ. And here let me entreat you to consider the following particulars. How worthy he is of our remembrance. How prone we are to forget him. How many gracious memorials he hath left us of himself. That if we forget him, he will forget us. And that our remembrance of him will be attended with the most happy consequences. Let us,

1. Consider how worthy he is of our remembrance ; and that, on account of his dignity and the excellency of his character,—the greatness of his love to us,—and his constant and kind remembrance of us. His dignity and the excellency of his character demand our affectionate remembrance of him. He is “the only begotten of the Father, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person ; by whom he made the worlds,” and whom all the angels of God, those bright and glorious spirits, reverence and obey. And shall we not remember a being of so much eminence, and with whom we are so closely connected, as he is the governor of the world, and “all power in heaven and earth is committed to him ?” But it is not so much high rank and great power, as wisdom, purity, and goodness, that claim veneration and esteem. Let us consider Christ then, as, in all moral excellency, the brightest image of the invisible and perfect God ; as “holy, harmless, undefiled ;” as “Jesus Christ the righteous ;” who is not only higher but purer than the angels, and is the beloved of the Father, “full of grace and truth.” And shall we forget so renowned a character, so bright a pattern of every thing amiable and good ? But as our minds are more affected with a sense of personal obligations than a view of distinguished excellency, let us consider the greatness of his love to us. “He remembered us in our low estate.” He knew from what a state of innocence, peace, and happiness man fell ; into what a distressful helpless condition we were sunk by sin, and what dreadful,

endless misery was before us. His eye pitied us, and he came down from heaven, and died to save us. "Herein is love," unequalled love, that he gave himself a sacrifice for our sins, and died the death of the cross, that we might not perish for ever, but be raised to eternal life. Consider further, how kindly he still remembers us. He owns a near relation to us, unworthy as we are; and "is not ashamed to call us brethren." And shall we forget a brother? One of whom we are members, even "members of his body, his flesh and his bones," Eph. v. 30, taken into the most intimate union with him? Though he hath left this world and is gone to heaven, and is there crowned with glory and honour, yet he is not forgetful of us. He employs himself there for our good. And as the Jewish high priest bore the names of all the tribes of Israel on his breast-plate, so Christ beareth the names of all his people upon his heart. He ever liveth to plead their cause, and "maketh continual intercession for them." He is always near to his faithful servants by his Spirit, to guide, protect, comfort, and bless them. He views their temptations and dangers with a tender concern, is touched with the feeling of their infirmities, and will make his grace sufficient for them. He governs the world for their benefit; is head over all things to the church, and will be with it alway even to the end of the world. He is gone to prepare a place for them, and will come and receive all his people to himself, that "where he is, they may be also." In the meantime, "in him we enjoy the protection of a king, the tenderness of a parent, and the rare fidelity of a constant friend." In him we possess whatever we want, and his fulness exceeds our utmost desires. And is not such a friend as this worthy to be remembered? Even "the memory of a just man is blessed; and the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." And shall we forget the holy and benevolent Jesus? Shall we be solicitous to preserve and honour the immortal memory of King William, our deliverer from popery and slavery, and yet take no pains to keep up the remembrance of Jesus, our Redeemer from sin and hell? Is it not most ungrateful, unkind, and base, to forget so faithful and kind a friend; our own friend, and our father's friend; yea, the friend of all mankind? No, I hope we shall not act thus: and yet,

2. Consider how prone we are to forget him. One would think there were no danger of it; that we should remember him more easily, naturally, and affectionately, than we do our nearest relations or dearest friends. But the very precept in the text intimates, that we are in danger of forgetting him. If Timothy needed this exhortation, in whom the Spirit of Jesus so largely dwelt, and furnished him with such extraordinary powers,—if Timothy, whose daily employment it was to study and preach the gospel of Christ, needed this exhortation, do we not need it more? Do not

our own consciences tell us, that we are apt to be unmindful of him? Many professing Christians seem entirely to forget him. They are "without Christ in the world;" and, as far as one can judge by their behaviour, never think of him at all. And whose conscience doth not accuse him of great deficiency in the devout remembrance of Jesus? Our heads and hearts are too full of other things; of the cares and amusements of life. We have seldom any thing to say about him; and scarcely meet with a fellow-Christian who will put us in mind of him. This shows that other things are uppermost in our thoughts; for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak." If we mention his name, it is too carelessly; without a due sense of his dignity and authority; without any savour of his love upon our spirits. We sometimes forget him on his day, and in his house, and I fear at his table too; and our thoughts fix upon other objects. Or, if we have some lively impression of him upon our minds at such seasons, they often vanish as soon as we leave the place. This shows how much we need the exhortation, and what pains we should take to keep up the remembrance of him. Further,

3. Consider how many gracious memorials he hath left us of himself, to make this duty easy and delightful to us. Objects out of sight are often out of mind. Our Lord knew our depravity and weakness, and that we should be ready to forget him. Therefore he hath given us many abiding memorials of himself, of his love, and our obligations. For instance, he hath given us his gospel. There we may daily read his discourses; may, as it were, still hear him speaking to us, and praying for us, and be affected with the gracious words that proceed out of his lips. There we may behold his manner of life, his miracles, his sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension. By the help of that, as a glass, we may take a view of the heavenly world, and see what he is doing for us there; and in all we behold his love. This gospel we always have with us, to remind us of our absent lord. Every time we read his word, in every prayer in which we mention his name, we are in effect called upon to remember him.—The first day of the week is "the Lord's day;" a day set apart from common days, to remind us of Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead on that day. He hath appointed pastors and teachers to "preach Christ and him crucified," and direct our thoughts to the obligations we are under to him, and our constant concern with him, as the support of the divine life in us. He hath appointed one ordinance, even his supper, with this special and immediate view, that we might remember him. There we see him in a light most attracting; "evidently set forth before our eyes, crucified among us." We eat and drink in a professed remembrance of him, and have "communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ." Every degree of

spiritual influence which we receive; any divine assistances and consolations, are a supply of his Spirit, and a memorial of his care and love. And when we have so many of these memorials; when they are so expressive, so delightful, and so often repeated, it must be inexcusable folly and ingratitude to forget him. Again,

4. Consider, that if we forget him, he will forget us; and what shall we do then? What else can we expect, if we live unmindful of him, but that he should forget us; that is, act as men do when they forget others; give themselves no concern about them, confer no favours upon them, but leave them to want and suffer and perish? If we forget Christ, he will withdraw the tokens of his favour, and take away his Spirit from us, and then his word and ordinances will be of no advantage. All our graces will wither. Our comforts will be lost. Yea, he will inflict upon us some sensible tokens of his displeasure; hide his face from us; and fill our hearts with anguish and terror. Besides "he hath the keys of death and the unseen world." He may therefore banish our spirits from his presence, and deny us mercy at the last day. In short (to use the words of a pious writer) "we deserve to be eternally forgotten of God, if we can forget our Redeemer." Once more, consider,

5. Our serious remembrance of him will produce the happiest effects. Why is Christ so desirous to be remembered by us? Not for his own honour and advantage, but for our benefit; because he knows what a good influence it will have upon our hearts and lives. And let me urge your remembrance of him by this thought more particularly,—it will confirm your faith in him. By meditating in his word, revolving in your minds his life and character, his doctrines, miracles, and resurrection, you will see further and stronger evidences arising, that he is a divine teacher and Saviour. You will thus be proof against temptations to infidelity; will hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering; and be able and "ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you." This remembrance of Jesus will tend to increase your love to him. You will see new beauties in his character, and feel new charms in his dying love; and will thus be led to "love him, whom you have not seen, and though now ye see him not, believing to rejoice in him." It will likewise promote your obedience to his commands, and your imitation of his example. By having his history, his precepts and motives, familiar to your minds, you will become solicitous to keep his word, and to "abstain from the appearance of evil." His example will at once direct and encourage you; and his love will gently, but powerfully, "constrain you to live to him." This will also animate you amidst the difficulties and sufferings of life, and be instead of a thousand arguments to make you active and patient. By remembering what he suffered, though innocent, and for your

sakes, your own sufferings will be rendered light and easy. By "considering him that endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," you will be preserved from being "weary and fainting in your minds," Heb. xii. 3. Especially when you reflect, that by his sufferings he hath taken away sin, which adds to the bitterness of affliction, and points the sting of death. The habitual remembrance of Jesus will make you zealous for his cause and interest in the world; eager to do something generous and charitable, in order to show your gratitude to your Saviour; to seek his things, and not only your own, and to espouse and support his gospel and honour. And it will establish your faith and hope that his religion shall still continue, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Again, this remembrance of Jesus will lead your thoughts upward to the world where he is gone. If we remember an absent and beloved friend, we shall think of the place where he is, the company he hath about him, and the work in which he is employed. Remembering Jesus, we shall be led to set our affections upon, and to "seek, those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." Thus this world will not get such a possession of our hearts as it is apt to do; nor shall we forget our resting-place. We shall be looking for the second appearance of Christ; and be careful to do nothing that may make it a terror to us, but every thing which may strengthen our hope, and make the prospect of it our support and our joy. This serious remembrance of Jesus, of his death and resurrection, of his promises, especially the great promise of eternal life, will help to reconcile us to the thoughts and the approach of death, and make us willing to depart and be with him. This happy effect it hath had upon thousands of his faithful servants. Let me mention one in particular; the learned and pious Dr. Leland; who in his last moments said, with a pleasing emotion, "I give my dying testimony to the truth of Christianity. The precious promises of the gospel are my support and consolation. They alone yield true satisfaction in a dying hour. I am not afraid to die. The gospel of Christ hath raised me above the fear of death; for I know that my Redeemer liveth." And finally, remembering Christ, who was raised from the dead, will confirm our expectations of a resurrection to eternal life. "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God," will animate our hopes. We shall be persuaded that "the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead, will quicken our mortal bodies." And the expectation of it will encourage us to "purify ourselves as he is pure, and to be diligent that we may be found of him in peace." These considerations then should lead us to maintain an

habitual remembrance of Jesus Christ. His dignity, the excellency of his character, the greatness of his love to us, and his kind remembrance of us, render him worthy of our most affectionate remembrance. We are nevertheless prone to forget him amidst the cares and amusements of life. Yet he hath left us many gracious abiding memorials of himself; as his gospel, his day, and ordinances. If with all these advantages we forget him, we must expect that he will forget us and disown us at last. But if we habitually remember him, our faith in him will be firm; our love to him fervent; our obedience to his commands stedfast; we shall be active, zealous, and patient, and have comfortable hopes of partaking of that glory which he hath promised.

And now, my fellow-Christians, I hope what hath been said hath excited and strengthened in you a desire and resolution to be continually mindful of Jesus. Let me therefore close the discourse with a few hints of direction, how you may most effectually keep up this remembrance. In the first place, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," or abundantly, "in all wisdom." "Search the scriptures," for they testify of Jesus Christ, as "the way, the truth, and the life." Make a conscience of reading some part of them every day; endeavour to understand its meaning; treasure up as much as possible in your memory; often call it to mind and meditate seriously upon it. Contrive and study to make every creature, as it were, a step to Christ. Let all the comforts you have in your bodily refreshments, your worldly enjoyments, your relations and friends, lead your thoughts to him who is the support of your spiritual life; who gives you the true bread, the heavenly riches; who is your nearest relation and most valuable friend. Further, would you keep up the remembrance of Christ, be often speaking of him one to another, and saying to your friends, as Archbishop Usher used to say to his, "Let us have one word of Christ before we part." Shall Christian friends meet together without one word of Christ, their common friend, who is their life and their hope, and from whose hand they expect the crown of glory? It is a copious and delightful subject, and it must show great ignorance and impiety in any to say, that it is an improper topic of discourse. Your hearts, like the disciples, will "burn within you, while you talk of him by the way," Luke xxiv. 32; and your friendship will by this means be growing up to the maturity of heaven. Further, let it be your care regularly and conscientiously to attend his ordinances, and particularly the Lord's supper. You come to his table with a professed intention to remember him: and if you have any seriousness of spirit, it will be difficult not to remember him. Let your attendance at it be regular and constant. This is the practice of the best Christians; and if you neglect the table, you will

forget the Lord. There every motive to holiness is set before you; especially the mercy of God and the Redeemer; the evil of sin; the hope of pardon; and the lively views of immortality: these all join to enforce and promote obedience. Finally, earnestly pray for the constant aid of the Spirit, to fix the impression of Christ more strongly upon your minds; to show you more of his excellent knowledge, his lovely character, his saving grace, his precious promises, and his great rewards. Our Lord hath described it as the office of the Spirit, to take of *his* things and show them to his disciples. He can restrain a wandering heart, fix a treacherous memory, and excite and maintain in us those thoughts of Christ, and desires after him, which will be a source of holiness and of joy. Thus, my brethren, may you act! And thus will you remember your Saviour to the best purposes, and the remembrance of him will be at once comfortable and edifying to you. Thus will you be preparing for that better world, where you will be for ever with him, see him as he is, and forget him no more. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXII.

MOSES' INVITATION TO HOBAB TO GO WITH HIM TO CANAAN.

NUMBERS x. 29.

And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel, the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.

“SOME persons,” saith a serious writer, “are fond of running down the present ministers of religion, in comparison of their predecessors; and complaining that the decay of piety is in a great measure owing to them. We have indeed reason to be very sensible of our defects; but may we not justly complain of most professing Christians in our day, that they are quite fallen from the piety and goodness of their ancestors; neither attending nor encouraging the labours of ministers, nor assisting and strengthening them by their private admonitions, as their forefathers used to do? Have we not reason to say, that the more pains are taken to prepare public discourses, the less pains our people are willing to take in supporting the credit, and seconding the good design of them. They are left to make their own way. If any will receive them, well and good. If not, they may vanish, as soon as delivered, for any concern that is privately shown to render them acceptable and useful.”* I

* Dr. Wright.

wish that ministers and people, instead of blaming, or even lamenting, one another's defects, would take more pains to assist one another in the great work of promoting religion. That we may enjoy your friendly and pious assistance herein, I propose at this time to give you a few important directions and encouragements, principally upon this head. And, that they may be more carefully attended to, and more easily remembered, I choose to give them by an allusion to, and an illustration of, the address of Moses to his brother Hobab in the text. I think myself fully justified in this application of the words: as the sacred writers often refer to the case of the Israelites, to their journey through the wilderness, and entrance into Canaan, as an emblem of the state of man in general, especially of good men while passing through this world to a better country, even a heavenly one.

It seems that Hobab, the son of Raguel or Jethro, for he was called by both these names, had been with his brother-in-law Moses, during his continuance at mount Sinai, and had seen all the wonders of the Lord which had been displayed there. When Israel was departing from thence to go to Canaan, Moses addresseth his kinsman in the text, and persuades him to accompany them in their journey thither; assuring him of their most friendly behaviour to him; and that he should be a partaker of all the good things which the Lord had promised to bestow upon them. It seems that, though Hobab at first refused, he afterwards accepted, the offer. For the Kenites, of whom we frequently read in the Old Testament, and who dwelt among the Israelites, were his posterity; as were also the Rechabites, Judges i. 16, iv. 11; 1 Chron. ii. 55. Thus Moses addressed his brother; "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." This passage may be considered as giving us,

I. An instructive view of the state of men, especially of good men, upon earth. They are travelling to another country.

II. It hints to us, that it is the duty of good men to invite and encourage others, especially their relations, to go with them to the better country. And,

III. It suggests a powerful motive, to recommend the invitation, namely, that "the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel," and that all who go with them shall partake of it.

I. Here is an instructive view of the state of men, especially of good men, upon earth.

They are travelling to another world. This is an image used by the best writers, especially the sacred ones; and it is daily used in our common language. We speak of going or walking

in a moral sense; of a course of action; of a good and a bad way. Perhaps there is scarcely a finer and more striking figure in the compass of language, than representing human life as a journey. There are many beautiful passages in the heathen philosophers and poets, where it is so described. It is a progressive motion, or moving forwards towards an end or place. No sooner do we begin to live, but we enter on this journey, and by night and by day, whether asleep or awake, we are going on towards its end. As we advance from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age, we travel from one stage of our journey to another, and come nearer and nearer to the close of it. We travel through days, and weeks, and months, and years. Every night finds us a day's journey, and every sabbath a week's journey, nearer to our eternal home. Some are got before us in the road, others are coming after us, some are travelling with us. All are moving on towards death and eternity. Some have a longer, others a shorter journey. Some move faster, others slower; but all are tending to death, which is "the end of all men;" "the house appointed for all living." In this respect Solomon observeth, "Do not all go to one place?" Eccl. iii. 10. But this figure may with peculiar propriety be used concerning God's people, for of them alone it can be said, as in the text, they are "going to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you." They are travelling, like others, through life; but they have a different end in view from the wicked, and take a different road. They have that place in prospect, which the infinite love of God hath prepared for his children, and which he hath promised to give them. They are travelling to that world of happiness, that state of glory and perfection, which Jesus, their Saviour, hath revealed to them. By his death he hath opened a way for their entrance into it; and he is gone thither to prepare it for their reception. "In my Father's house," saith he, "are many mansions, and I go to prepare a place for you." This place they have in their eye, in their thoughts and pursuits. With attention and care they inquire the way to it. They are solicitous to keep in the direct road. If ever they wander from it, they think on their ways and turn their feet to it again. The word and Spirit of God are their guides. They have many comforts and refreshments in the way, but their thoughts are too intent upon the place to which they are journeying, to take up their rest and abode any where short of it. The promise of a faithful God to give it them, reconciles them to all the difficulties and the length of the way. Thus are all men travelling to another world, a future state, and pious men to the heavenly regions. The text hints to us,

II. *The duty of good men to invite and encourage others to go with them to the better country.*

Moses' address to his brother Hobab naturally represents the benevolent temper of zealous Christians, who will invite others, saying, "Come thou with us." The social principle in the human mind, natural compassion and benevolence, incline men to desire the happiness of others. The forms of inquiring after it and wishing it, make much of our converse with each other. But there can be no true charity where there is not true piety. Where that prevails in the heart, he that feels its influence will wish, and not merely wish, but will endeavour to promote, the happiness of the souls of his fellow-creatures. When he seeth them walking in a way that is not good, and the feet of some hastily running to do mischief, he considers what destruction and misery is in their paths, and how dreadful their end will be. This affects his heart. Compassion for them, and what he knows of the importance, and hath tasted of the pleasures of religion, strongly urge him to invite them to go with him; to walk in the "ways of wisdom, which are pleasantness, and in her paths, which are peace." He is desirous to impart to others the favours which God hath bestowed upon him, and direct them in the way to that happiness, which is all his salvation and all his desire. He will take every opportunity to point out to them their errors, to warn them of their danger, and invite them to run the ways of God's commandments. When he sees them backward, he will argue the case with them. Hobab seemed averse to Moses' proposal in the text, and answered peremptorily (v. 30), "I will not go, but I will depart to my own land and kindred." Thus a fondness for the world, and a dislike to leave old companions and break off agreeable connexions, though they may be vicious ones, leads men to refuse the invitation of their Christian brethren. It leads them to say, "I will not go," when they are persuaded and urged to seek and move towards the better country. But the zealous Christian is, like Moses, loath to take a denial. He gives them all the encouragement in his power, and will adopt the suitable language of the man of God (v. 31), "Leave us not, I pray thee." He will promise them his faithful friendship and best assistance, and say, as in the text, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." I will watch over you, direct and comfort you. I will be every way kind to you, as my duty to God and regard to your happiness oblige me to be. But he will principally urge, as Moses doth, the promises of God, and vouch the divine authority for all the encouragement he gives to others (v. 32). "And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee." This then represents the duty of every true Christian; to say to others, "Come thou with us." This was the language of all the prophets and apostles. It was the language of all our Lord's precepts, invitations, and promises. It is the lan-

guage of every faithful minister, and it is in effect the language of every benevolent, zealous Christian. All their attempts of every kind to do good to the souls of others, may be summed up in these words, "Come ye with us." We are to observe,

III. *The text suggests a powerful motive to enforce the invitation ;*

Namely, that "the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel;" and that all who go with them shall partake of it. It is probable that Moses, in the text, not only refers to that fruitful country which God had promised Israel for their inheritance, but to all the other blessings which he had promised them, as his peculiar and favoured people. He assures his kinsman, that he should have some part of the land for a possession, and share with them in their privileges. All true Christians are called by St. Paul "the Israel of God," Gal. vi. 16, "the seed of Abraham," God's covenant people; and he hath spoken good concerning them, that is, he hath promised them all happiness. He intends for them "a better country" than any upon earth, "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them." He hath promised them something good in itself, essentially, unchangeably good; what is suited to the nature of a rational, sanctified, immortal spirit, and able to fill its largest desires. It is, in one word, a state of perfect rest, knowledge, holiness, love, and joy. It is the favour and enjoyment of God, the best of beings, the source and fountain of all good. It is a happiness common to all the Israel of God, to be enjoyed in the society and friendship of the holy angels, and in the presence and under the gracious smiles of the Lord Jesus. It is a good, the possession of which is secure to them, and in no danger of being lost or lessened. It is a good which will amply repay all which they give up to obtain it, and all which they may suffer in their journey through the wilderness to it. "Oh how great is that goodness, which God hath laid up for them that fear him!" Ps. xxxi. 19. It is too great to be expressed or conceived by mortals. The Lord Jehovah, the almighty, unchangeable, eternal Being, hath spoken this good concerning his Israel and promised it to them. He hath spoken, by the dictates of reason and by the course of his providence, that "verily there is a reward for the righteous." He hath spoken this by his holy prophets. He hath in the clearest, strongest manner, spoken it by his Son Jesus, who "hath brought life and immortality to light by his gospel;" yea, as the apostle observeth, "the hope of eternal life, God that cannot lie promised before the world began, but in due time manifested by the preaching of the gospel," Tit. i. 2. With these declarations and promises, we are to comfort and encourage one another. This is the powerful motive which Christians ought

to urge upon each other, to persuade them to go with them in the road to heaven ; that God hath spoken good concerning his people, and promised them everlasting happiness.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let this subject lead us seriously to consider and inquire where we are going.* From the view we have been taking of the Christian's life, as a journey to the heavenly Canaan, we may learn of what great importance it is for us diligently to examine whither we are travelling. We shall, no doubt, readily acknowledge that we are all journeying to the grave ; passing through the several stages and periods of human life to the end of it. Many have gone before us. Some of our friends and neighbours are daily finishing their course. And it would be wise and happy for us, if we "laid this to heart," and "considered our latter end." Those of you who are young and healthy may think that you have a long way before you. But you may be deceived, as thousands have been. Your journey may be nearer ending than you think of ; yea, may end in a few days. But it is of the utmost importance for you to consider that the end of your journey is not the end of your being ; but an entrance on an eternal, unchangeable state of happiness or misery. There is another world before you, consisting of two vastly different states ; to one or other of which you are all travelling. You are soon to enter on everlasting rest and glory ; or everlasting sorrow, pain, and misery. And now, sirs, I appeal to your understandings and consciences, whether any thing can be of more importance than to consider to which of these places you are journeying. What a dreadful thing will it be to mistake the way, and to find, at the end of life, that you have been travelling to hell, while you imagined yourselves travelling to heaven ! To prevent this fatal, irremediable mistake, let me direct and entreat you to inquire, whither you are going. That you may know this, consider whether you are God's Israel ; for of them only he hath spoken good ; that is, are you Christians indeed ; what you profess yourselves to be ; the faithful, obedient servants of Christ, in whom there is no guile and hypocrisy ? Do you ever search and try your ways, that you may know in what path, and to what end, you are walking ? Were you ever deeply convinced, that you once walked in a way that was not good ? Have you been delivered from spiritual Egypt ; from the slavery of sin, the captivity of Satan, and the dominion of bad habits and sinful lusts ? Inquire, not merely about your general course of action, but whether your hearts are changed ? What are the principles and motives on which you act ? What regard do you pay to the great God, and his favour and acceptance through Christ, in all you do ? Are you walking in the way of sinful cares, gains, and pleasures, or in the way of devotion,

piety, purity, and love? To assist you to form a judgment of your own state, inquire further with what company you are journeying. Are you walking in the broad way, which is much frequented; or in the narrow path, in which few walk? Do you choose for your acquaintance and companions those who fear God, who are strictly serious and conscientious; or the sons of mirth and folly? Do you take most delight, are your hearts most engaged, in religious exercises, or vain diversions? Let me ask further, to what end you are walking? Doubtless you will say, to arrive at the heavenly world. But remember that many, who choose the end, do not choose the way. They never enter upon it, or soon forsake it. They have no earnest desire of the favour of God and communion with him; no ambition to resemble him in purity, righteousness, and love. Their land and their kindred, like Hobab's (v. 30), draw them another way. Their prevailing fondness for earthly things prevents their aspiring after heavenly glory. Alas! sirs, I cannot but fear that some of you are journeying towards destruction. And I would fain awaken you and engage you to change your course. Let me, therefore, in my own name, in the name of my fellow-Christians, and in the name of my Lord and theirs, invite you this day, "Come with us." Others are persuading you to take a different way. They are inviting you to drink, game, and sport with them. They are instilling into you prejudices against the ways of religion and the serious preachers of it. They say to you, as Solomon describes the wicked in his day as saying, "Come with us; cast in thy lot among us; we shall find all precious substance." We say to you, as Solomon himself saith to his young reader, "My son, walk not thou in the way with them: refrain thy feet from their path; for it leadeth to the chambers of death, and is the way to hell," Prov. i. 11, 14, 15. I exhort and beseech you, young friends, to join yourselves to the Lord, to take his servants for your friends and companions, and to "keep the path of the righteous." For God hath spoken good concerning them. Their way leadeth to everlasting life. And what stronger motives can you have to walk in it? Let me address you in the language of the prophet, "Stand ye in the ways and see; and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls," Jer. vi. 16.

2. *Let God's people invite, and endeavour to persuade, others to go with them*; to travel with them to the heavenly country; and thus imitate the example of the man of God in our text. Fain would I awaken the zeal of sincere Christians. For here is their capital defect; that they are not deeply and tenderly solicitous about the souls of others. We want more love and zeal, to excite and encourage them to journey with us to the good land. I am not exhorting you to a zeal to make others proselytes to your party and persuasion, and lead them into

your particular track; though in that sense, there is neither bigotry nor impropriety in saying, "Come with us." But let us be earnestly desirous to bring them into the road to heaven, though they do not choose our particular track. It is the duty of real Christians to warn and admonish others; to point out to them the evil and danger of sinful ways; to invite them to set their faces heavenwards, and give them all possible encouragement so to do; especially by assuring them of the everlasting good which they shall obtain. This is peculiarly the duty of those who are, like Moses and Hobab, related to one another, or have some peculiar connexions one with another. Let husbands and wives, for instance, help one another forward towards heaven, and, as the apostle exhorteth, walk as "heirs together of the grace of life." Let parents, according to the divine command, "train up their children in the way in which they should go;" and labour, above every thing else, that they may "walk in truth." Let masters and mistresses be watchful over the souls of their servants, and, like Abraham, command and encourage them "to keep the way of the Lord." Persons in these relations have frequent opportunities for such pious and friendly addresses. What they say will probably be heard with greater regard than what is said from the pulpit, or by those who are no way connected with the persons to whom such addresses are made. But it is the duty of all Christians, though most lamentably neglected, to "provoke one another to love and to good works," to "exhort one another daily," and to encourage each other in the heavenly road. I entreat you to do this, out of regard to the honour of God; that you may please him, resemble him in love, and fall in with his gracious design, "who would have all men to be saved." Let me entreat you to do this, from a regard to the salvation of others. This is the greatest kindness you can do them. It is the best return you can make them, for any favours which you have received from them. Do this out of regard to the support and interest of religion. You, by divine grace, may persuade them; they, having tasted the pleasure of God's ways, may persuade others; and those may persuade others; and thus the good effects of your pious exhortations may be extensive and lasting. The world may be the better for them, even to the end of time. Do it also out of regard to your own satisfaction and pleasure. If you can persuade others to go with you, they will be your delightful companions in your journey; and you will be to one another, as Moses told Hobab he would be to them, "instead of eyes" (v. 31), that is, you will direct, assist, and comfort each other. Whether you succeed or not, God will accept and reward your pious and charitable attempts. If you turn sinners from the error of their ways to righteousness, your pleasure will be inexpressibly great; and eternally great will be your reward in

heaven. Be persuaded then, my fellow-Christians, to exert yourselves in these benevolent services. Pity your ministers amidst their labours, difficulties, and discouragements, and endeavour to "work together" with them. We shall be so far from thinking that you intrude upon our office, that we shall esteem it the greatest favour, if, like some pious women mentioned by St. Paul, you will "labour with us in the gospel," Phil. iv. 3. This you will do most effectually, by inviting and encouraging others, with the most serious and tender concern, to go with you in the way to the heavenly Canaan. If they refuse it, or seem to decline it, do not despair of success, but repeat the friendly attempt. Hobab at first positively refused to go with Moses; but upon second thoughts he repented, and went. "Be not then weary in well-doing." And may God excite you to these pious endeavours, and succeed you in them! Finally,

3. *Let God's Israel look forward to the good which he hath spoken concerning them.* My fellow-travellers, it is a noble encouragement to us, that we do not run at an uncertainty. God hath said that "we shall reap, if we faint not;" and it is impossible for him to lie. Let us be thankful that he hath promised us so great a good; marked out the road to the better country so distinctly; and given us so many examples of those who have travelled towards it and now possess it. Let us often think of "the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you," and converse with our Christian friends about it. Let us, by studying the scriptures and the exercise of faith, take a survey of the good land; and observe the nature and extent and ratification of God's promises. Let us frequently contemplate the glory of heaven; compare it with what is to be done and enjoyed here; and set it against every thing that we may be called to suffer here. Let the prospect of it excite our courage and our diligence. Though the way be long, rough, and thorny, and surrounded with enemies, let us not faint; remembering where we are journeying to, and what we shall possess there. We are travelling indeed through a wilderness, and we may want this or the other good thing in it. But let us remember the good which God hath spoken concerning his Israel. Let not the difficulties of the wilderness discourage us, nor the temptations of it allure and corrupt us, as they did the Israelites. If we walk by faith, and keep the end of our journey, the place which God hath promised, always in our eye, it will be our cordial and our preservative. Above all, let us be careful that we do not tire in the heavenly road, but hold out to the end. Soon shall we come to the conclusion of our journey, and finish our course with joy. May God hold up our goings, and confirm us in the way of holiness to the end! This he will do, if we watch and pray. Thus he hath declared, "They that wait upon

the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint," Isa. xl. 31.

DISCOURSE XXIII.

THE FOLLY AND SIN OF MEN IN PERVERTING THEIR OWN WAY,
AND THEN FRETTEING AGAINST GOD.

PROVERBS XIX. 3.

The foolishness of man perverteth his way ; and his heart fretteth against the Lord.

THAT our times are in God's hand, and the various circumstances and events of our lives under his direction, will be allowed by every serious mind to be most evident, comfortable, and instructive truths. But so perverse and ungrateful are many, that they abuse these truths, and reflect upon the blessed God, by ascribing to him, and charging upon him, all the afflictions which befall them. Whereas a little more thought and reflection would convince them that they have brought many, if not most, of these afflictions upon themselves ; and that God is no further accessary to them, than as in the nature of things, and the course of his wise providence, he hath established a connexion between folly and suffering, between sin and misery. This is so bad a temper, and withal, it is to be feared, so common, that I am very desirous to convince you of its sinfulness, and dispose and assist you to guard against it. It was a sin as old as Solomon's time, according to his observation in the text, that "the foolishness of man perverteth his way ; and his heart fretteth against the Lord." It was the case in Greece as well as in Judea : for Homer, who lived soon after the time of Solomon, observed that "men lay those evils upon the gods ; which they have incurred through their own folly and perverseness." It is the case likewise in Britain, notwithstanding our great advantages by the gospel of Christ.

We may express the meaning and design of the text in this observation, that it is a common thing for men to charge those evils upon Providence which they have brought upon themselves. "The foolishness of man" signifieth his want of thought and reflection ; his indiscretion and rashness ; or his sin and wickedness, as the word "foolishness" often signifies sin in Solomon's writings. It "perverts his way," leads him aside from the path of wisdom and prudence, safety and happiness. By this means he brings himself into trouble ; is reduced to necessity, perplexed with difficulties, or oppressed with sorrow. Then he committeth this grand error after all the rest, that

“his heart *fretteth* against the Lord.” He is vexed, not at himself, but at Providence; and complains that God dealeth unjustly or unkindly by him. The word here rendered “fret-teth” is very emphatical. It is generally translated to “be angry,” or “full of indignation.” It is, in the prophecy of Jonah, used concerning the raging of the sea; and so beautifully expresseth the tossing and tumult, the commotion and uneasiness, which there is in a discontented, ungoverned mind. It is like “a troubled sea when it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt;” there is no composure and peace in it. So that such a person makes himself miserable, while he complaineth of his Creator and censureth his providence. For the illustration of Solomon’s remark in our text, we may observe that the general principle on which men act in this case is right and just; but the conclusion they draw from it is wrong; and that the temper which they manifest herein is very foolish and wicked.

I. The general principle on which men act in this case is right and just.

When they fret against the Lord they suppose that there is a God; that he observes and interests himself in the affairs of his creatures; that he not only directs and manages the events which relate to kingdoms, nations, and other large communities, but the events which relate to every particular person; that evil in general, as well as good, proceedeth from the hand of the most High; and that it is a considerable part of his providential government to try, exercise, and promote the virtues of his rational creatures by the discipline of affliction. These principles they take for granted; and they are quite agreeable to the light of nature and the word of God. But then,

II. The conclusion they draw from hence, namely, that they have not brought their afflictions upon themselves, is generally wrong, and their charge upon the providence of God groundless and unjust.

I apprehend that the best method of illustrating and confirming the truth of Solomon’s remark, and guarding you against this error, is by laying before you some instances of it, taken from the practice and conduct of mankind; instances that we see or hear of almost every day. Therefore I would observe, that it is often the case with regard to men’s health; their worldly circumstances; their relations in life; and the state of their minds and religious concerns.

1. It is often the case with regard to men’s health. Here they “pervert their way,” and yet “fret against God.” It is common to hear some persons complaining that they are always sick or in pain, never well; that they have no enjoy-

ment of life, and cannot do as others do. They can scarce open their mouths but it is with a complaint, or the very tone and accent of their voices betrayeth the fretfulness of their hearts. They complain that God denies them the health and spirits which he hath given to others. They envy every one that is more strong and lively than themselves; and are sometimes ready peevishly to say, that God hath given them life upon very ill terms; that it is not a gift worth having, unless they were better able to perform the business and enjoy the comforts of it. Now with regard to many, perhaps most of these complainants, they have perverted their own way. Their intemperance and excesses have injured their constitutions. Or if they are not chargeable with excesses that are reckoned criminal, they may have been fond of indulging and pampering the body, and erred in the quantity or quality of their food. While others of the fretful sort, merely from a principle of covetousness, have denied themselves proper nourishment, or the means to recruit their health, when by any disease or accident it hath been impaired. Many bring themselves into these unhappy circumstances by indolence and inactivity. Their limbs grow weak for want of use, and their spirits flag for want of exerting them. While others exceed in too close an application to business, exhausting at once the strength of the body and the vigour of the mind. The unruly passions of some injure their frame. Excessive sorrow brings sickness, pain, and death. "Envy is the rottenness of the bones;" and "they that will be rich, pierce themselves through with many sorrows." In short, a physician of the first abilities and eminence in his profession hath observed, that "not one in a thousand of mankind dieth a natural death."* And is it reasonable that any of these persons should censure the providence of God, when they have thus perverted their own way, and brought sickness, pain, and decay upon themselves? The remark in the text is applicable to many,

2. With regard to their circumstances in life. We see men impoverished and reduced to straits and difficulties. They have had no business to do, or have lost it. They are cheated, or others break in their debt, and they are ever meeting with losses and disappointments. They will tell you that they are diligent, honest, and willing to live, but providence doth not favour them. They complain that God brings them into straits and embarrasseth their circumstances. They have often an evil eye upon others. See how they live! how prodigiously they thrive, and what fortunes they get! They are ready to condemn all mankind as dishonest, and commend every man's calling but their own. They not only complain that their friends

* Dr. Gregory.

have no pity for them and will not help them, but that providence itself frowns upon them. Now I have scarcely known an instance of this kind, but where I have had reason to believe that these complainers have perverted their own way. In the case of some, it is owing to their choosing a wrong profession and calling in life, following their youthful inclinations, and despising the advice of their wiser parents and friends. Thus they engage in some business which doth not suit either their genius, or their strength, or their fortune, or their capacity. Most persons that are in straits bring themselves into them through their own negligence, carelessness, and extravagance. So Solomon observeth, "The glutton and drunkard come to poverty. By a whorish woman a man is brought to a morsel of bread. By idleness of hands the house droppeth through, and drowsiness clothes a man with rags." What multitudes are there who out-trade their capital! They do not consider what debts they owe, what interest they have to pay, and what a family they have to support. They are ambitious to live and make a figure like others in better circumstances. They are fond of company, and expensive and unprofitable entertainments, or support their children or other relations in pride and extravagance, and so impoverish themselves. Many are ruined for this world by an indolent temper. Some neglect their shops and follow their sports. Others are easily deceived and imposed upon, because they will not be at the pains to think and ask the advice of their friends. And when they find their circumstances impaired, instead of greater diligence and frugality, they run hastily into some scheme of getting money more easily, by which they are ruined at once. They see their affairs going bad, and that they cannot answer the just demands made upon them, yet they are too idle to apply to work, or too proud to retrench their expenses, and so "poverty cometh upon them like an armed man." In many a surly disobliging temper, in others want of punctuality in dispatching orders and settling accounts, brings them into distress. There would be very few paupers, few burdensome to their friends and parishes, if mechanics and servants would consider what is before them in life; if they would save against a time of sickness and old age, and not spend all they get in rioting, dress, and vanity. It is to be feared that many neglect daily and seriously to pray for that "blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow with it." In short, (to use the words of a judicious writer) "whoever will trace upward to the springs and causes of public and private events will find, except where the immediate finger of providence is visible, that what is usually called ill luck is the effect of negligence or imprudence." And the noted Cardinal de Retz used to say, that "misfortune was

only another word for imprudence." The remark in the text is applicable to many,

3. With regard to their relations in life. For instance, how many unhappy marriages are there! Some persons of both sexes complain of their being unequally yoked. They envy every one who is more happy in that relation than themselves, and murmur at providence for directing them to so bad a choice. They lament their distress, and say it was their fate; when alas, it was their folly. They preferred wealth, beauty, or wit, before good sense, good temper, and piety. They chose by the sight of the eye, or the vanity and lusts of the heart, without considering that it was to be a relation for life, and what qualifications were necessary to make that agreeable. Their friends foresaw and foretold the misery they were bringing upon themselves; but they would not believe them. Instead of taking any pains to remove whatever is the occasion of coldness and uneasiness between them and their yoke-fellows, they act as if they studied to increase it, by bitter words, teasing complaints, unkind surmises, jealous suspicions, and particularly by behaving ill to each other's relations; than which, there is not a more common source of conjugal unhappiness, nor a more evident sign of folly and perverseness. The remark in the text is applicable to many with regard to their children. They complain that their children are idle, disobedient, and undutiful; keep bad company, and will not be restrained; that they cannot manage them; that they have not such comfort in their children as other parents have in theirs; and that God hath not given them grace. Now I believe that in most instances of this kind parents have perverted their own and their children's way. They are unconcerned about their children's souls, neglect family prayer and instruction. Or if they pray with them and teach them the principles of religion and to pray, they neglect the government of their passions, will not allow them to be contradicted, and suffer them always to have their own will. They wink at those follies which ought to be restrained, and yet strangely wonder that their children are untractable. Some parents show great partiality in the treatment of their children. They suffer a favourite child to tyrannize over the rest, and so lay a foundation for family jealousies and contentions. While they teach them religious principles, they teach them also the love of money, dress, and show. They set them a bad example of eagerness for the world; speak with applause of those who are rich and fine; and make money their children's reward when they do well. They are glad to have their children taken notice of and entertained by those who are much their superiors. Hereby young persons contract a taste and habit of living above their rank and circumstances. Thus they become averse to, and unfit for, those humble stations for which providence evidently

intended them. And probably nothing hath contributed more than this, to the corruption and ruin of so many ministers' children; though in other respects they have had some peculiar advantages in their education.* Many parents are more intent upon getting a fortune for their children, than giving them a good education, or instilling into them those principles and dispositions which would prevent their abusing what they possess. They set them as apprentices or servants in families where there is no religion, and where they are likely to be corrupted. Yet they wonder that their children should be worse than others, and cannot see the cause of it; when every one else sees it plainly. This remark is likewise applicable to the case of servants. What perpetual complaints have we of bad servants! How often do we hear it said, "No one hath such bad servants as I; or is obliged to change so often. I have the worst luck in the world." And their heart fretteth against the Lord. Now these complaints likewise are often self-procured. There are perhaps no methods used to make servants serious and good: no family prayer; no religious instructions given them. They are often kept from public worship on the Lord's day, unnecessarily employed about secular business, and allowed to waste sacred time in amusements. In many families, where God is daily worshipped and the sabbath sanctified, no pains are taken by the masters and mistresses to gain the esteem and affection of their servants. They are imperious in their commands, unreasonable in their expectations, and perpetually chiding and teasing them. They too often and too long blame trifling failings, and aggravate greater ones. Hence they lose their own reputation, and can procure no servants but those whose characters at best are suspicious; and who will not be concerned to please, because they think it impossible. Once more, under this head; many are blameable for their discontent with the world about them. They complain of the ill behaviour of their acquaintance and neighbours; "that they meet with no esteem and respect, but are slighted, neglected, and forgotten; that they are afflicted, but have no pity shown them; that the world is weary of them, and wants to have them gone." All this may be true; and yet no more than they deserve: at least have brought upon themselves, by insolence, pride, and ill manners; or by tiring all about them with their complaints, and acting as if they were determined not to be pleased. Thus doth the folly of men in social life pervert their own way. I add, in the last place,

4. The remark in the text is applicable to the case of men's minds and their religious concerns. This we have in part seen

* "My care and fear for my children is, lest being kindly entertained by, and conversing with, persons so far above them in rank and fortune, though of the best sort, should lift them up; whereas I had rather they should be kept low."—P. Henry's Life, p. 105.

under the former heads. It is no uncommon thing for those who make a profession of religion, and one would hope had "the root of the matter" in them, to be uneasy and fretful without any external cause. They complain that "others can find comfort and pleasure in religion, and the worship of God, but they cannot; that they want that inward peace and hope, which many enjoy; and God denies them those assistances which he grants to others." Now, this is often owing to their own negligence; suffering their passions in early life to gain the ascendancy over them; taking little or no pains to furnish their minds with useful knowledge, and to have the word of Christ dwell in them richly. They neglect the worship of God for every trifling reason: perhaps they neglect to seek the blessing of God upon the appointed means of grace, and to mix faith with the word which they hear; so that ordinances do not profit them and afford them comfort. They have some sins which are unmortified; and these obscure their hopes. Yet such is their disposition, that their ministers and friends have no encouragement to offer them any admonition and advice, as they have just reason to apprehend that it will be received with resentment or esteemed impertinence. They complain that God giveth Satan power over them; when by neglecting watchfulness, self-government, and prayer, they even tempt the tempter; make their hearts a proper abode for him; and their own passions furnish him with instruments to perplex and torment them. They are ready to say "when they are tempted, they are tempted of God;" whereas "God tempteth no man;" but they are "drawn away of their own lusts and enticed," James i. 14. By irregular passions and a fretful temper they grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and cause him to withdraw; and then complain of God, that he hath taken away his Holy Spirit from them. To these and many such instances which might be mentioned, those words of the prophet may be applied, "Their own iniquities correct them, and their own backslidings reprove them," Jer. ii. 19; or in the language of Solomon, "They eat of the fruit of their own way, and they are filled with their own devices," Prov. i. 31.* I now proceed to show,

III. *The folly and wickedness of this conduct.*

It is very absurd, for in most of these cases they have no one to blame but themselves, or the chief fault, if they suffer by others, is in their own conduct. It likewise proceeds from

* "The happiness of life depends
On our discretion and a prudent choice;
Look into those they call unfortunate,
And closer view'd, you'll find they are unwise;
Some flaw in their own conduct lies beneath,
And 'tis the trick of fools to save their credit,
Which brought another language into use."—Dr. Young.

ignorance of themselves. The eye seeth not itself, and most men are strangers to their own faults and imperfections, or take pains to vindicate, excuse, or palliate them. They have perhaps friends; but these will not submit to the painful task of pointing out their errors, or showing them the cause of their distresses, through false tenderness to them; or perhaps, as was hinted above, because they think it will answer no end but provoke their resentment. But this temper is chiefly owing to pride; to such a high opinion of their own wisdom and goodness, that they think it next to impossible that they should have done any thing to bring affliction upon themselves. Such persons are generally the last to own that they have judged or acted wrong. Every one sees that they have perverted their own way but themselves. In these cases, to fret against the Lord, and impute our misfortunes to him, to charge upon him what we bring upon ourselves, is an impious, horrible insult upon him. It is charging him foolishly, unjustly, and blasphemously. It is true, indeed, he hath established a necessary connexion between folly and vexation, between vice and misery. But therein he hath acted like a wise and good governor, and consulted the happiness of the creation. This is the best imaginable means to keep men from the ways of sin and folly. Yet supposing that we had not perverted our own way, but God had seen good to exercise us with the afflictions we suffer; to fret against him in that case would be very wrong, and show an irreligious spirit. He hath a right to do this, as we are sinful creatures and deserve no good thing at his hand. And if our burdens were heavier, and our sorrows more acute, we have no reason to "complain for the punishment of our sins." Especially when we reflect, how many mercies and comforts he continueth to us, and that he "exacteth less than our sins deserve." Consider further, this temper is bad for ourselves. Fretfulness only tends to aggravate our afflictions and to hurt our minds. It spoils our relish for the comforts that are continued unto us, and drives away from us the friends that would pity and help us; for men will not be teased into kindness and compassion. It destroys the love of God and the power of religion in the heart, and will unfit us for the blessed world of friendship, peace, love, and joy. Besides this, it may provoke God to bring upon us some heavier affliction, to humble the pride of our hearts, and lead us to own that "the Lord is righteous."

APPLICATION.

1. *Let me exhort young persons, and those who are setting out in life, to consider, how much prudence, caution, and foresight are necessary for them; since there are so many instances in which men pervert their own way, and bring themselves into straits, difficulties, and sorrows. "Ponder" then, my young friends,*

“the path of your feet, and look well to your goings.” Let prudence and discretion guide you ; let integrity, sobriety, and diligence preserve you ; let meekness, civility, and good temper appear in all your converse and transactions with others. Desire, attend to, value, and follow, the sage advice of your parents, and other wise and experienced friends ; at least weigh it carefully and deliberately before you venture, in any one instance, to act contrary to it. Remember what Solomon saith, in the verse before the text, “He that hasteth with his feet, sinneth.” Let this caution be particularly attended to, in those two most important concerns ; the choice of your profession and occupation, and the choice of a companion for life. Remember, what a lively writer suggests, that “repentance is an excellent visiting friend, when she reminds us of past miscarriages, and prescribes rules how to avoid them for the future ; but a most troublesome companion, when fixed upon us for life.” Above all, let the fear of God rule in your hearts, which will be the best preservative from evil ; and daily look to him for wisdom. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

2. *We may infer, what a great and mischievous evil pride is.* This vice prevents men from seeing their dangers and their errors, and hinders their returning to the ways of wisdom, prosperity, and happiness. It leads them to think that they were in no fault, and never yet went out of those ways. It disposeth them to throw the blame of all their calamities on their parents, friends, neighbours ; yea, upon the blessed God : upon any one but themselves. Let us endeavour, then, to be sensible that we are weak, ignorant, and fallible creatures, and not be “wise in our own eyes.” Let us likewise pray that God would give us a discreet and sober mind, and “hide pride from us.” Thus shall we be most likely to escape mistakes, or soon to discern them, and with honour and comfort to retract and amend them.

3. *We may learn that it will be of great use to us to make a serious inquiry, to what cause our afflictions are owing.* When you are exercised with troubles and sorrows, take a careful review of your past temper, conduct, and way of life ; and ask yourselves that question which the prophet puts to Israel, “Hast thou not procured this to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God ?” Jer. ii. 17. Consult your friends upon this point. They are better judges in many cases than you can be ; for partiality and self-love blind the eyes. Desire them faithfully to tell you, to what they apprehend your afflictions are owing ; and be not angry if they deal plainly with you, even though you should think they mistake the case, for that will prevent their using a friendly freedom with you another time.

Above all, earnestly pray that God would enable you to trace up the bitter streams to the fountain; that he would point out to you your own errors, and “show you wherefore he contendeth with you,” Job x. 2. The knowledge of this is of great importance, as it will tend to promote your humiliation and patience under present afflictions, and your caution and watchfulness for the future. Once more,

4. *Let us all guard against this great sin of fretting against the Lord.* There are few indeed so wicked, or so void of decency and good manners, as to vent their complaints against him openly; to tax the holy Lord God with injustice or unkindness. But it is feared, many do it secretly; and Solomon may perhaps intimate this in the text, when he speaks of the heart, not the tongue, fretting against the Lord. And, indeed, what else is the language of all our murmurings and complaints? Is it not fretting against the Lord, though we do not use his name? As far as we have been guilty herein, let us be deeply humbled before God, for the sin and folly by which we have perverted our way. Let us repent of the affront we have offered to him, the dishonour we have brought upon religion, and the injury we have done to our own souls. To prevent this for the future, let us remember, that though we may not have brought the evils which we suffer upon ourselves, yet *sin* is the cause of them. Our iniquities may have provoked God either immediately to afflict us, or to permit others to do it; or suffer us to pervert our own way, and “in the greatness of our folly to go astray,” Prov. v. 23. In short, if you must complain, complain of yourselves, that you are much worse than you ought to be, and cannot bear the common events of life with tolerable patience. Where sin sits heavy, affliction sits light; and the afflicted person will be penitent, humble, and thankful. Accordingly the prophet Jeremiah thus describes a patient sufferer: “He sitteth alone and keepeth silence,” without grieving and disturbing others with his complaints, “because he hath borne the yoke of affliction. He putteth his mouth in the dust,” with deep and silent humiliation, “if so be there may be hope,” Lam. iii. 28, 29. Be careful, my brethren, especially those of you who are in affliction, that you do not indulge a complaining spirit. To fret against men is foolish and bad; this disposition will grow upon you, and you will come to fret against the Lord. Endeavour to keep up good thoughts of God, and low thoughts of yourselves, and then you will never fret. Consider how much better God is to you than you deserve, and how much worse you are than you ought to be; and it will silence every complaint. Thus also by your afflictions your hearts will be made better, and you will be led to see and acknowledge that “all that God hath done unto you, hath not been without cause,” Ezek. xiv. 23, but with perfect justice and the kindest

design. In short, we can never be truly easy and happy, till we accustom ourselves to prudence and caution in our conduct, and to look forward to the certain or probable consequences of it; yea, till we not only gain some considerable degree of patience and contentment, but can with Job, amidst his heavy afflictions which he had not brought upon himself, "fall down before God and worship, saying, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Job i. 20, 21. Amen.

DISCOURSE XXIV.

THE DESTRUCTION OF LOT'S WIFE TO BE REMEMBERED.

LUKE XVII. 32.

Remember Lot's wife.

WHEN our Lord had been foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem and the miseries coming upon the Jews, in St. Mark's gospel, he concludes the prophecy thus; "And what I say unto you, my disciples, I say unto all, Watch;" thereby plainly intimating that the several exhortations to watchfulness and caution, contained in that prophecy, are intended for us and for his disciples in every age, as well as those to whom they were immediately addressed. Our Lord is foretelling the same event in the chapter where the text is. After he had represented the sudden manner in which the calamity should come, and illustrated it by the flood which drowned the whole world, and the destruction which overwhelmed Sodom, he exhorts them to fly with the utmost speed from the approaching calamity, and to enforce the exhortation, he commands them in the text to "remember Lot's wife." According to his own reasoning, what he said to them he saith to us. It is a caution which we, my friends, always need; in peaceful as well as troublous times; considering the destruction that shall come upon all the ungodly, and how prone we are to linger and trifle, when we should be intent upon securing our everlasting salvation. In his name and by his authority, then, I say unto you, "Remember Lot's wife." And I shall consider,

I. What we are to remember concerning her; and,

II. For what purpose we are to remember her. Let me show,

I. *What we are to remember concerning her.*

And here you will observe, that Christ takes it for granted that his hearers were well acquainted with the calamity which befell her, according to the account of it in the Old Testament; and this short hint might be sufficient for them. But as I fear many among us are not so well acquainted with the scripture

history, as probably the Jews in general were, it may be proper for me to give a short account of the destruction of Sodom, and then more particularly show, what were the sin and punishment of Lot's wife, which are the circumstances we are called upon to remember. The history we have in Genesis xix.: and there we find, that Sodom and Gomorrah were very wicked cities, abandoned to all manner of licentiousness, and to vices not to be named among Christians. Their cry came up to heaven for vengeance, and God was determined to destroy them. Abraham earnestly interceded for them, and he had prevailed, if there had been ten righteous persons in all Sodom. A kinsman of Abraham's, whose name was Lot, whom St. Peter calls "a just and righteous man," lived there. Two angels in human form came to Sodom and lodged at his house; and, having seen a fresh and flagrant instance of the Sodomites' wickedness, they told Lot that the city should be destroyed next day. They commanded him to leave the place, with his family and near relations, if he could prevail upon them to go with him. Early in the morning the angels hastened Lot and his wife and his daughters out. And while Lot lingered, unwilling to leave his goods, at least his children behind him, the angels brought him and his family forth, and set them without the city, saying, "Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, neither stay in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed:" a command, that was addressed to them all. Lot, fearing he should not be able to reach the mountain before the destruction came, desired permission to retire to Zoar, a little town near. His request was granted, and that place was spared for his sake. "Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire from heaven" upon those wicked cities, and overthrew them and destroyed all their inhabitants, and the plain where they stood was changed into a sulphureous lake, called the Dead Sea. But what our text refers to, is the account we have of Lot's wife (v. 26). "She looked back from behind him and became a pillar of salt." And here we have,

1. Her crime. "She looked back from behind him." She was loath to leave Sodom. She saw her husband and her daughters go forward, and they no doubt persuaded and urged her to make haste. But she loitered, when she should have fled; stayed behind, vexed and discontented, till they were got into Zoar; for Moses tells us the storm did not come down till they were safe there. Now in this her conduct there were unbelief, disobedience, ingratitude, and a worldly spirit. There was great unbelief. She seems to have doubted the truth of the angels' declaration, though she had, the night before, seen an instance of the profligacy of the people, and the miraculous power of the angels, in striking them with blindness. Seeing it a fine morning, for Moses observes, "the sun was risen on the earth when

Lot entered into Zoar ;” seeing no cloud gathering, no signs of a tempest, she thought she might have been safe in Sodom ; at least that the destruction would not be so great and sudden as was threatened. Further, she was disobedient to express repeated commands to hasten out, not to look behind her nor stay in the plain. She was likewise very ungrateful to God, who had informed the family of the approaching destruction, and urged them to fly, “lest they should be consumed in the punishment of the city.” This aggravated her disobedience. But it seems, the principal reason why she looked back was a worldly spirit. Her heart hankered after what she had left behind. She was loath to part with her house, goods, and substance ; to lose her relations and acquaintance there. For our Lord introduces this caution, immediately after he had commanded his disciples to fly from Jerusalem, and not go into their houses to take away their goods. So that an inordinate, unreasonable love to earthly things led her to look back and linger in the plain. This was her crime, and this we are carefully to remember. Let us consider,

2. Her punishment ; and this is expressed in a few words, “She became a pillar of salt.” She was overtaken by the storm which destroyed Sodom. The lightning blasted her. She was struck dead, but not thrown down. She stood erect, like a pillar or statue. The brimstone and salt, which were rained down, fell upon her, and not only crusted her over, but penetrated through her whole body. And this may be illustrated by what Moses saith, when speaking of the destruction of Sodom, “The whole land thereof is brimstone and salt and burning,” Deut. xxix. 23. Thus she was instantly petrified ; changed into a substance that would endure ; a metallic salt ; of which, in some places in the east, they make their houses, and which will endure for many ages. This sudden, strange, awful punishment was inflicted upon her in the very act of wickedness ; and she continued as a monument of the divine displeasure. Josephus, the Jewish historian, who lived a little after Christ’s time, saith the pillar remained to his days, and that he himself had seen it, almost two thousand years after the event. But whether it were so or no, she stands in the bible as a monument for ever ; a warning to all succeeding ages, to remember her crime and avoid her misery. And this leads me to the second thing proposed, which was to consider,

II. *For what purposes we should remember her ;* what improvement we are to make of this singular event. And the general use is, to take warning by her, not to trifle, when our eternal salvation is at stake. To enforce this warning and caution, let us consider, wherein her case and ours resemble each other. And here let the following particulars be carefully attended to. God will certainly bring destruction upon the wicked. He hath

mercifully provided a place or method of safety. He giveth us many calls and motives to hasten to it. But men are very apt to linger and look back, even after they have begun to escape, and the awful calamity of Lot's wife should be remembered, in order to prevent delay. Consider,

1. God will certainly bring a dreadful destruction upon the wicked. Of this we have the strongest assurance. It is the dictate of natural reason and conscience. It appears from God's moral perfections. The holiness of his nature invariably leads him to hate sin, and the honour of his government, and regard to the happiness of the creation, require him to punish it. That the righteous should be treated as the wicked, or the wicked as the righteous, would (as Abraham argues in the case of Sodom) be inconsistent with the rectitude of "the Judge of all the earth." His word expressly declares that he will punish them. This is the language of all the inspired writers. We need no angel to come from heaven to tell us this. God's own Son, the Lord of angels, hath informed us of it. By his doctrine and death he hath shown us the evil of sin. He hath revealed the wrath of God, not only against those that sin, and "declare their sin, like Sodom," but against "*all* unrighteousness and ungodliness of men." We are assured of a day of judgment, when "God will render to every man according to his works; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." The destruction of Sodom for its abominations shows, as the apostle Peter observes, that God "knows how to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished," 2 Pet. ii. 9. It shows us that the most profligate and insolent bodies or societies of men can neither escape nor resist his anger. While the destruction of Lot's wife shows us that he will not pass by the wilful transgression of single persons. Further, the future destruction which God will bring upon the wicked will be inconceivably dreadful. They "shall be turned into hell;" and in order to give us some idea of that place of torment, it is frequently described by images and figures taken from the ruin of Sodom. "Upon the wicked," saith the Psalmist, "God shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest," Ps. xi. 6. Hell is described as "a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," in which "the fearful and unbelieving, murderers, whoremongers, idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part," Rev. xxi. 8. And St. Jude observes (v. 7) that "these cities are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." So dreadful will the destruction of the wicked be.

2. God hath mercifully provided a place or method of safety; a way to escape this destruction. He not only tells us of future misery, but shows us how we may be delivered from it; that we may not be driven to despair, and plunge ourselves into greater guilt and ruin, because there is no hope. Now it is the Lord

Jesus Christ, "who delivereth from the wrath to come," 1 Thess. i. 11. He is, as it were, our Zoar; the city of refuge to which we are to fly, and where alone we can be safe. He inviteth sinners to come to him, that they may have life; to believe and trust in him; and this is described by the apostle, as "flying for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us," Heb. vi. 18. This is the sure foundation which God hath laid, on which whosoever trusteth shall never be confounded; while every other refuge to which sinners betake themselves, will prove "a refuge of lies, which the storm shall sweep away and overflow," Isa. xxviii. 17. In order to be safe in him, we must entirely leave Sodom; that is, forsake every sinful way, and renounce all the unfruitful works of darkness. We must become new creatures, have our temper and spirit, our leading aims and pursuits, different from the men of the world; and while we live among them, like righteous Lot in Sodom, be uncorrupted by their principles and manners; and, like him, be grieved for and reprove their filthy conversation and unlawful deeds. I observe,

3. God giveth us many calls and motives to hasten and escape for our lives. In the exhortations given by his prophets, by his Son, and by his apostles, speed is required and insisted upon; and the folly and danger of delay are pointed out. We are commanded to "fly from the wrath to come," like persons alarmed with a sense of danger and desirous of salvation. He calleth men to hasten by his ministers; who are so frequently admonishing trifling sinners, and persuading them, by the terrors of the Lord, to make no delay. He calls men to this, by reminding them that destruction may come suddenly upon them, like a thief in the night; and that the consequences of being found sleeping and unprepared, will be eternally dreadful. The call is repeated and enforced by the many instances of persons dying suddenly or in their full strength. God puts it into the hearts of Christian friends to admonish sinners, as Lot did his relations and townsmen. Their own consciences often remind them of the necessity of speed. Some awful passage of scripture, the attack of sickness, or the death of their acquaintance, rouse their consciences, alarm their fears; and the Spirit of God follows them with this solicitation, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." God is gracious in all these calls and awakenings. Thus, as was said of Lot and his wife, "the Lord being merciful to them," lays hold on their hands, while they linger; brings them out and says, "Escape for your lives." "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I make thee as Sodom? how shall I set thee as Gomorrah?" I observe,

4. Men are apt to linger and look back, after they have begun to escape. The death of Lot's wife shows that none of the family could be safe, till they were got into Zoar. No more can sinners be safe, till they are in Christ; till they become sincere

penitents and believers. There are many who are convinced of this; they have had serious impressions made upon their hearts, and have been awakened to see that they are in the road to destruction. They have begun to fly from bad company and wicked ways; and entered on a course of serious preparation for eternity. They have set their faces heavenwards. But they make no speed. And the same dispositions, which led Lot's wife to look back, retard them. For instance, when their first alarm is over, they begin to question whether there was any reason for their fears; whether the word of God denounceth such judgments upon sinners as they hear in the congregation; whether ministers are in earnest in their threatenings and admonitions. They appear to them, as Lot did to his wicked sons-in-law, "as one that mocketh." They question whether the threatenings of wrath in scripture belong to any but the most profligate sinners. While they are thus demurring, Satan steals away their good impressions, and hardens them in their unbelief. They see others lingering; and some too who make a profession of religion; and they think that an excuse for their lingering also. Like Lot's wife, they are loath to leave their old acquaintance and companions; loath to break off their connexions with them, and renounce their sinful pleasures. Sometimes, when they are disposed to do this, they fear lest their companions should make a jest of their religious concern. And this doth more to draw them back than all the terrors and mercies of the Lord can do to quicken them. Again, the love of the world and the influence of present things pull them back, as they did Lot's wife. Worldly business and pursuits draw off their attention from the one thing needful. Pleasure courts and amuses them. Their attachment to earth and sense is so strong, that they make no advance towards salvation, but look back. Their serious impressions and convictions are lost; and their "goodness is as the morning cloud; and like the early dew, it passeth away." Thus men trifle in the most important concerns, and linger on the very brink of ruin.

5. The destruction of Lot's wife should be remembered in order to quicken us; to prevent our looking back and excite us continually to press forward. Christ commands us to remember it, to call it often to mind, and fix our thoughts closely upon it. We see that lingering was fatal to her; it was to the Jews, when Jerusalem was besieged; it hath been so to thousands since. And we may apply to multitudes in this generation, what our Lord saith just before the text, "As it was in the days of Lot, they did eat and drink, they bought and sold, they planted, they builded;" minding nothing but the business and pleasures of this life; "but the same day that they went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed,"

Luke xvii. 28, 29. And God grant it may not be the case of any of you, when Christ cometh to call you hence ! These instructions the event which we have been considering suggests to us ; that God will bring a dreadful destruction upon all the wicked ; he hath mercifully provided and discovered a way to escape it ; he giveth us many calls, and urgeth many motives to engage us to fly from it ; men are apt to linger and look back, after they have begun to escape ; and the destruction of Lot's wife should be remembered and considered in order to quicken them.

APPLICATION.

Let me now conclude with a serious address grounded on these particulars. If you have never yet attempted to escape from spiritual Sodom, from a state of sin and death, let me address you as Lot did his children, "Up, get ye out of this place ; for the Lord will destroy all those that are found in it." Linger not in the plain of destruction ; but fly to Jesus Christ ; and by sincere repentance and faith receive him as a Saviour ; for there is salvation in no other. "To-day, while it is called to-day," and you may escape and be saved, "hear his voice and harden not your hearts." This is not a vain thing, but your life ; it is a matter of the most urgent necessity, and your eternal *all* is at stake. If you are tempted and inclined to defer it, "remember Lot's wife." Have you, through grace, been awakened and humbled for sin ? Have you begun to forsake evil company, and to leave the abodes and the practice of wickedness ? I exhort, entreat, and charge you, never to look back. Never venture to return to a sinful way. Never hearken to a solicitation to return. Never hesitate a moment about it. Never send back a kind look to the state and the company which you have forsaken ; as if you had left them with regret, and were sorry you had gone so far. Remember what it was that seduced Lot's wife to look back, and guard against that. Let not the love of money, or business, or pleasure, or friends, or relations, ever stop you in your course heavenwards, or divert you from reaching forth to that which is before you. Rather give up every thing, than your immortal interests. "For what is a man profited, if he gain the world and lose his own soul ?" Let me address the exhortation to all of you, whatever progress you have made in religion. Many of you have enjoyed great religious advantages. So had Lot's wife. No doubt that righteous man, who admonished his wicked neighbours and grieved for their vices, would by his conversation and example instruct and admonish his family. You are nearly related to good men. So was Lot's wife. You have escaped the grosser pollutions which are in the world. Your characters are good and fair ; and you make a profession of piety and devotedness

to God. All this was the ease likewise with Lot's wife. His family was distinguished in Sodom by sobriety, hospitality, decency, and piety. Yet notwithstanding all this, she trifled, lingered, and perished. Who then dare say, *I am secure?* Who would not tremble for himself, and not be high-minded but fear? Who doth not see the greatest necessity for watchfulness and prayer? Look upon this pillar of salt, my brethren; look upon this monument of human weakness and frailty, and of divine justice; and receive instruction from it. Learn from it that "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Learn from it that "if any man draw back, God's soul shall have no pleasure in him;" and "what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God." Learn from it to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling," and when you "think you stand, to take heed lest you fall." And let it excite your daily fervent prayer, that you may be quickened by the word of God, and "kept by his mighty power through faith unto salvation."

To conclude. Let the story of Lot's wife be made familiar to your minds, and seriously and frequently considered. Think of her crime; of those wrong principles and affections which led her to it; and in how awful a manner God testified his displeasure with her. And may it be effectual, through the energy of divine grace, to preserve you from apostasy and declensions, and engage you continually to press forward and lay hold on eternal life; that ye be "not of them that draw back to perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." And may he, who alone is able to do it, "keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy!" To him be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. Jude 24.

DISCOURSE XXV.

CHRIST'S COMPASSIONATE APOLOGY FOR HIS DROWSY DISCIPLES.

MATT. XXVI. 41.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

WHEN the apostle is exhorting Christians to "lay aside every weight, and to run with patience the race that is set before them," he adds, "looking unto Jesus, the author (or leader) of our faith," Heb. xii. 1, 2. And amidst all the afflictions of life and the difficulties of our Christian course, a lively view of the patience, tenderness, and compassion of our leader and fore-runner, is very animating and encouraging. We have many instances of these in the New Testament; and a very affecting and comfortable one in the text. Our Lord, a little before his death, re-

tired into a garden for prayer, and took with him Peter, and James, and John. There he endured a great agony, and went through a scene of very deep distress. He commanded his disciples to watch with him, that they might observe what passed, for their own instruction and the benefit of others; to whom they might relate and transmit it. After he had spent some time in the most fervent prayer, he came to them, and found them sleeping. He saith to them, and particularly to Peter, who had been most forward in his profession of regard to his master, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" keep awake so short a time, while I was in such an agony? "Watch and pray, that ye enter not in temptation," that ye be not overcome by the temptations to which you will be exposed. He then adds in the text, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." A noted commentator* observes, that "this is not intended as an excuse or mitigation of their sleeping in these circumstances, but as a motive to prayer and vigilance." I rather think it is to be considered in both these views. "The spirit is willing;" your hearts are honest; you have a great love to me, and your resolutions to adhere to me are sincere; "but the flesh is weak;" the infirmities of the body prevail over the sentiments and resolutions of the spirit. On this account I pity and excuse your negligence and drowsiness; but exhort you to be more careful for the future. This sense seems most agreeable to our Lord's general manner of treating his disciples. And taking the words in this light, they suggest much, both for our encouragement and our caution. And we may draw these three remarks from them:

I. The faithful servants of Christ find the body a great hindrance to the spirit.

II. Christ maketh very compassionate allowances for the infirmities of his servants.

III. Nevertheless it is their duty to watch and strive and pray against them. I will illustrate these particulars, and add some suitable reflections.

1. *The faithful disciples of Christ often find the body a great hindrance to the spirit; especially in religious exercises.* Man is a creature "fearfully and wonderfully made;" consisting of flesh and spirit; a body composed of gross matter; weak, frail, and reducible to dust; and an immaterial, immortal soul. The principles of each are very different; and yet they have a strange influence one upon the other. Every one knows and feels this, though none can clearly explain or understand it. The body is a clog to the operations of the mind; so that it can take in but few ideas, extend its views but a little way, and keep its attention fixed to any thought but for a short time. Hence our im-

* Whitby in loc.

provements in knowledge are so inconsiderable; attained very gradually, and with great labour; and the memory frequently loseth what it hath attained. Where the heart is sincere, and desireth to serve God and engage in religious exercises with vigour and zeal, the body will not keep pace with its desires and attempts, but quickly flags and tires. In persons of the best constitutions this is often the case. Cares relating to the body distract the thoughts; and the liveliness of the spirits hurrieth them away from one object to another, so that the most important concerns are not so coolly and justly considered as they ought to be. This is particularly the case of persons of weak constitutions and feeble spirits. A little attention wearies them. When they would be most thoughtful and lively, they are least so. A fear, a desire, a hope, an alarm, that would scarce affect others, is sometimes too weighty for them, disturbs their repose, and clogs their faculties. They are "servile to every skyey influence." A storm, a shower, a sudden change of weather sometimes throws the animal frame into such confusion and disorder, that the spirit is quite confused and disordered by it. Drowsiness or a kind of stupor often seizeth them, and they are scarce capable of a few minutes' fixed attention, or of retaining one sprightly, devout, or comfortable thought. And in proportion to the pains they take to shake off the gloom, and keep up the ardour of attention and devotion, is their weariness afterwards. The flesh exposeth us to many temptations. Particularly to gratify its appetites beyond the bounds of temperance and reason; to indulge in sleep beyond what is necessary and healthful; to be fretful and impatient under afflictions and infirmities; and through fear of sorrow, loss, and pain, to sacrifice faith and a good conscience. These temptations are strong even when the spirit is sincere, willing, and solicitous to avoid the appearance of evil, and suffer, or give up, every thing for God and religion. So St. Paul describeth this case; "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would," Gal. v. 17; or rather, "ye do not perform the things that ye would." Further, the spirits of Christ's faithful disciples are often oppressed with unreasonable fears of death. In their deliberate judgment they are sometimes willing to remove to the other world; yea, desirous to depart. But a love of the body, and a fear of the pain and circumstances of dying, depress and terrify them, so that they are, as the apostle expreseth it, "subject to bondage." The spirit is divided between desires and fears; and the weakness of the flesh is sometimes too much both for reason and faith and hope. The remark in our text is peculiarly applicable to the aged, whose bodily imperfections, pains, and infirmities increase with their advancing years. Though their appetites are less strong and dangerous, yet their

temptations to impatience and fretfulness, and their incapacity for lively devotion and fixed meditation, generally increase. Oftentimes the inward man decays with the outward, and the weakness of the flesh damps the willingness, and abates the ardour of the spirit; especially when they apprehend they are approaching their great change and entering upon an awful eternity.* It is with pleasure I proceed to observe,

II. *Christ makes very compassionate allowances for the infirmities of his faithful servants.*

Thus in the context; he saw his disciples struck with the reproof he had given them for sleeping, and overwhelmed with confusion; he therefore makes a kind excuse and apology for them in the text. Here let us observe, that Christ knows the infirmities of the flesh, and makes the kindest allowances for them which the circumstances of the case will admit.

He knoweth the weakness and infirmities of the flesh; for God "created all things by Jesus Christ." He was the Almighty's instrument to bring all things into being, and form and unite the bodies and souls of men. He must therefore know how the body affects the mind, and what infirmities of the spirit arise from the flesh, what are wilful and allowed, and what are involuntary. He knoweth the weakness of the flesh, because he once dwelt in it. He "took part of flesh and blood," and was "in all things made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful high priest," Heb. ii. 17, 18. He was subject to hunger and pain, to weariness and drowsiness; and he felt those appetites which are common to men, though he always had them under an entire command. His knowledge of the frame and circumstances of mankind is perfect; and his goodness and love, and the remembrance of what he suffered, while he dwelt in flesh, dispose him to make the kindest allowances which the case will admit. Accordingly the apostle observeth, and the thought is very encouraging, "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Again he saith, "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities,

* It may be an encouragement and consolation to the aged in such circumstances, to mention the case of some eminently pious and useful men. It was observed of Mr. Baxter in his old age, that though he had no such degree of doubt as was any great trouble to his spirits, or procured any sinking, disquieting fears, yet he could not say that he had such certainty of his own sincerity in grace, as excluded all doubts and fears to the contrary. Dr. Grosvenor once told a friend,—"When I was young I thought I could expire with all the courage of a hero; but old age is timid. When I feel some more violent and threatening symptoms, and reflect, that in a few hours or days I shall be made or lost for ever, the thought makes me shudder." Dr. Watts, in the latter part of his life, when worn down by pain and weakness, often expressed himself on this head with great uneasiness; and would say, "I hope I am safe. I hope I have not been all my life acting in disguise; but it is hard to say."

but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," Heb. iv. 15. He doth not require of us impossibilities; nor expect any measure of devotion and obedience, but what with due resolution we can perform. In estimating the conduct and character of his servants, he taketh in every circumstance of difficulty and opposition; their struggles with the temptations of the world, and especially with the flesh. It is certain, that the same acts of devotion, self-denial, and obedience, may have more virtue and excellency in them, when performed by some than others. Men cannot form a just estimate of this; because they do not particularly know, how much difficulty there ariseth from the flesh in performing them. But Christ can judge of it, and he will undoubtedly take it into the account. Some, who are blamed for remissness and negligence in his service, may appear in his sight to do more than those who blame them; or even than others, who are applauded for their zeal and activity. And, according to the gracious tenor of the gospel, they are entitled to a greater reward; as the widow's mite exceeded the larger contributions of others, because she had less in proportion out of which to give, and therefore our Lord commended her. So when the disciples murmured at a pious woman, who anointed his head, he took her part, and said to them, "Let her alone, why trouble ye her? She hath done what she could," Mark xiv. 6—8. Upon the same principles, other acts of religion, though they appear small and inconsiderable, may be more pleasing and acceptable to Christ, because performed by persons of weak constitutions and languid spirits, than those which appear more splendid, and which they who perform them are almost ready to think meritorious. Where he seeth a willing mind, and that his faithful servants cannot do what they would, he accepts that willing mind, and pitieth and excuseth their infirmities; "for he knoweth their frame, and remembereth and considereth that they are dust." This he doth now, and he will appear to do it in the judgment of the great day. He doth not now "despise the day of small things." He doth not "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." And when he cometh to render to every man according to his works, he will make gracious allowances for their bodily infirmities, and what they suffered from the opposition and weakness of the flesh. I go on to observe,

III. *That nevertheless it is our duty to watch, and strive, and pray against these infirmities.*

Thus he exhorteth his disciples, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," q. d. I know that ye mean well; but remember the weakness of human nature; and if that on the one hand engageth me to pity and excuse you for being thus

overpowered with sleep, let it on the other hand excite you to be more watchful for the time to come. In order to engage the compassion of Christ towards ourselves, and to be entitled to this kind apology, two things are required; we must be sure that the spirit is willing, and must watch and pray against the infirmities and temptations of the flesh. We must be sure that the spirit *is* willing, that our desires to serve Christ are sincere; that our devotion proceeds from an upright heart, and that our resolutions of obedience are deliberate, honest, and firm. It is necessary that we "take heed to our spirits," watch all their secret motions, and keep a constant guard upon them, that the fervour of them may be maintained. To imagine that the compassion of Christ removes or lessens our obligations to keep our hearts with all diligence, is a shameful abuse of it; as you would think your servants very base and ungrateful, if they grew careless and idle, because you kindly passed over some small faults and negligences. But it is to be carefully observed, that though the mind may not give way to a rebellious murmuring thought, yet as it is in part still weak and sinful, it may feel some, yea much reluctance, to that holy obedience, that composed submission, which is most suitable to God's wise and gracious designs, and most conducive to our own salvation. We may upon good grounds say, "Lord, the spirit is willing;" yet be forced to add, "Help thou its unwillingness." In that case, he will undoubtedly accept and help the willing mind.

We must also strive against, and not give way to, the infirmities of the flesh. We cannot indeed new model our frame; but perhaps it may be mended. Or if that cannot be done, care, watchfulness, and self-denial may give us a greater command over it, and consequently over our thoughts and affections. In various cases a regular diet, proper physic, early hours, and especially habitual exercise and motion, would alleviate many infirmities. It is the duty of every sick and infirm person to use these means, if he hopes for the blessing and help of the almighty Physician. These would throw off part of the weight that hangs upon the spirits and enfeebles the mind; and thus it would become more capable of reflection, devotion, and active services. If persons (to refer to the case of the disciples) are liable to be overtaken with sleep in the house of God, and do not watch with Christ one hour, they cannot expect his pity and excuse, if they make themselves drowsy by an excess of eating and drinking; or place themselves in such a posture as disposeth them to sleep; or neglect any pains to keep awake. Let it be always remembered, that indulging any bodily appetite to an excess makes it more violent and craving; that giving way to any bodily infirmity, without exerting all our strength to throw it off, will make it worse. Let us remember that it is our duty, as men and as Christians, to "keep under the body, and bring

it into subjection ;” to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts ;” to “lift up the hands that hang down,” and to rouse our languid spirits. It is our duty never to suffer the passions of the mind to prey upon the body, nor the weakness of the body to disturb and unhinge the mind. It will indeed require great self-denial, and a long and hard struggle, to overcome evil habits, and unreasonable indulgences of the flesh ; but these must be submitted to ; else our spirits are not sincere and willing ; nor shall we be entitled to the Redeemer’s kindness and compassion. Let us then watch ; watch, lest we unreasonably please and gratify the flesh ; watch, when we are in places or company where we may be in danger of sin ; and watch especially when engaged in the exercises of religion, that we may do our best, worship God in spirit, and attend upon him without prevailing distraction. Let us likewise pray and call in divine aids. God can remove or lessen the weakness of the flesh ; or, if he doth not, can give the mind such an ascendancy over it, that it shall be no great hindrance to us. He can sanctify us in body as well as spirit ; and give us fixedness and fervour of heart in his service, notwithstanding the greatest bodily infirmities. This is very evident, since he hath supported the hearts of many of his servants, even in dying moments ; and they have never felt and expressed such ardour of devotion, love, and joy, as when flesh and heart have been failing. If we thus watch and pray, the kind Redeemer will excuse and pardon our unallowed imperfections, and we shall meet with acceptance in the great decisive day. These important truths are intimated to us in the text ; that the faithful servants of Christ find the body a great hindrance to the spirit, especially in religious exercises ; that Christ makes very compassionate allowances for their infirmities ; nevertheless, he expects that they watch, and strive, and pray against them. I now proceed to the application of the subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *The compassion and grace of Christ are worthy to be admired and trusted.* It is a just and beautiful observation of Archbishop Tillotson, that “the gentle rebuke our Lord gives his disciples, and the kind apology he makes for them, are very remarkable ; and the more so, as his mind was then discomposed with sorrow, so that he must have a deeper and tenderer sense of the unkindness of his friends.” What a good master do we serve, my fellow Christians, who is not strict to mark our iniquities, and to punish every little negligence ; who doth not reject the services of the young, the infirm, and the aged, but accepteth the willing mind, and pitieth and excuseth all its involuntary imperfections. Let this engage us to seek an interest in the friendship and grace of our Redeemer, to love

him in sincerity, to serve him faithfully, and never allow ourselves in any thing which may be displeasing to him. I urge this upon you because we may, and probably shall, be disappointed in our reasonable expectations of compassion and tenderness from our friends and brethren. When the world frowns upon us, or by sickness we become incapable of serving others as we have formerly done, we shall find ourselves mistaken if we lay much stress upon old acquaintance, whom we are apt to call by the name of friends. One who knew the world very well hath observed, that "we frequently endeavour to make ourselves remembered by certain persons who are desirous to forget us, and in whom we rather create a disgust, than an inclination to do us good offices. Those that are really willing to serve us in our distress, are impatient to show us the desire they have to do it. As for those who expect to be courted, we may take it for granted, that they have already, as it were, formed a design to abandon us, and that they look upon our most reasonable requests as very troublesome importunities." Now how natural it is that our experience or observation of this conduct in human friends, should increase our esteem for the religion, the character, and temper of the benevolent Jesus. His religion is, indeed, a dispensation of mercy and love; "his yoke is easy and his burden light." Let us cheerfully trust his never-failing compassion and grace, and his unchangeable fidelity. Let us rejoice in his intercession; and with pleasure think, that our prayers and praises, and other services, are presented to God by this "merciful High Priest," and all pass through his tender and gracious hands. And seeing we have a mediator who hath felt, and still feels with us,—who knows that we are flesh, and views all our infirmities with a pitying eye, "let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." We may infer,

2. *The weakness of the flesh will be no excuse for wilful and allowed sins.* This is a plain consequence from the manner in which our Lord's exhortation to his disciples, and his apology for them, are connected; and from what he saith of the willingness or sincerity of the spirit. Yet I fear there are many professing Christians, who think that the gratification of bodily appetites to an excess is not criminal, or will easily be excused because these are strong and importunate. Others think, that because their constitutions are infirm, this will excuse their frequent neglect of public worship, or other religious services; and the indulgence of impatience, fretfulness, and all the tumultuous passions. As to the former sort I would observe, that the appetites of the body are implanted by our all-wise Creator to answer valuable purposes. But he hath given us reason to guide us, that we may not act like brutes. He hath given us

his word to direct and assist us to control irregular desires, and moderate and regulate those which are lawful. To plead that flesh and blood cannot forbear this, or do or suffer the other, would be some excuse if men were nothing but flesh and blood. It would be an excuse for a vicious horse or dog. But while men have reason and conscience, and the aids of scripture, such a plea is as dishonourable to them as it is irrational and impious in itself. Some men think that their spirits are willing because they know their duty, have some just notions of God and religion, and of the evil of sin, and have good intentions and inclinations, as they call them. But if at the same time they live after the flesh and obey its lusts, it is a certain sign of an unwilling, hypocritical, and wicked mind. This is so far from extenuating, that it aggravates their guilt. As to the other sort, who plead their infirmities as an excuse for neglecting religion, or indulging unbecoming transports of passion, I have in effect answered their plea under the third remark; and shall only exhort them not to be deceived, for Christ will not be mocked. Every wilful, allowed neglect of duty is inexcusable. If men's infirmities keep them from the house of God, but scarce any other place where they have a mind to go; if their passions are violent, and no pains taken to rule and subdue them, and no mastery gained over them, it is the spirit that is weak more than the flesh, and watchfulness and prayer would at once strengthen both. Every one that would be considered and treated as a disciple of Christ, must "deny himself" and "endure hardness;" and this must extend both to body and mind, that both may be capable of serving God and our generation.

3. *Let us learn to be candid, patient, and compassionate, one towards another.* "I beseech you, brethren, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ," that ye be "pitiful and courteous," and "kindly affectioned one to another;" that ye learn of him, who was meek, charitable, and gentle. Let us remember that we all are flesh, all weak, all sinners; and daily need the mercy and compassion of God and the Redeemer. Let us then not be severe in censuring the faults of others, but represent them with all the softenings of humanity, and make every candid excuse for them that we can. But peculiar tenderness and compassion are due to those who are infirm and afflicted; and there never should be any thing in our behaviour to them inhuman, ludicrous, or unkind. Let us bear with their impatience and peevishness, not answering again, though we cannot but inwardly condemn these irregularities. Let us be careful that we do not, by uncharitable censures, add affliction to the afflicted. Let us not irritate their distresses by urging them to do what they probably cannot do, and blaming them for not doing it. This is too common a way of treating the afflicted

by those who never felt their grievances. It may have the appearance of kindness, but it is indeed a cruel kindness. Let us make all favourable allowances for the weakness of the flesh. In this sense, "those that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," as our Lord Jesus Christ did. And, finally, the conduct of Christ to his apostles shows us how we ought to behave to others when we ourselves are afflicted. Persons who are sick and infirm, or otherwise distressed, are apt to think that they have a right to complain, and that their circumstances are an excuse for impatience and fretfulness. They are ready to aggravate every seeming neglect, or even friendly advice, into a crime. But our blessed Lord, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, and almost overwhelmed with distress, treated his unkind disciples with tenderness and compassion, and excuseth their almost inexcusable sloth and negligence. A thwarting, cross, and peevish behaviour, complaining of all about us as unpitying and unkind, is an addition to our own burdens, and discomposeth our spirits. It deprives us of that cheerfulness with which our relations and friends would attend on us and serve us, if we were patient, composed, and thankful. It is also highly displeasing to God who correcteth us, and doth it "for our profit," to exercise and improve our virtues, and "make us partakers of his holiness." "Let us then put on bowels of kindness and compassion, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering," and "arm ourselves with the same mind that was in Christ Jesus," 1 Pet. iv. 1.

4. *How delightful are the views of heaven to a good man!* For there the spirit shall never be unwilling, and the flesh no longer weak. To enjoy the candour and compassion of others is comfortable; but it is more comfortable not to need them. When good men are dismissed from the burden of the flesh, they are in joy and felicity. Glorified saints shall view Christ in all his majesty and grace; shall no longer need his compassion, but be for ever happy, as the objects of his love and complacency. The spirit shall be alert and active, and feel nothing to interrupt its noble work or sublime pleasure. At the resurrection these vile bodies shall be changed, and made like the glorious body of Christ, and be beautiful and convenient habitations for glorified spirits. They shall have no appetites to tempt and perplex. No disorderly passions shall arise from them to torment or distress the soul. There will be no occasion to fetch in fresh recruits by food or sleep, nor will they ever be subject to sickness and pain. They will never be tired with the work of heaven, nor ever weary of it. There shall be no infirmities in ourselves to occasion languor and weariness, and no infirmities in those about us to exercise our patience or require our sympathy. Let us be daily thankful for these delightful views which the gospel opens upon us; medi-

tate frequently and seriously upon them; and consider them as the strongest motives to “glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are his.”

DISCOURSE XXVI.

KEEPING GOD’S COMMANDMENTS THE SUREST EVIDENCE OF A GOOD UNDERSTANDING.

PSALM CXI. 10.

A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.

MEN are generally ambitious to be esteemed wise. To call a man a fool, is reckoned a great reproach, and often resented as the highest affront. Now the text intimates to us, that the best method to avoid the imputation of folly, and secure the credit of our understandings, is to be truly religious. The Psalmist, having celebrated the greatness and glory of God as displayed in his works, and his goodness and compassion as displayed in his daily providence, proceeds to celebrate the wonders he had done for Israel, and particularly those excellent commandments and statutes which he had given them. He then concludes the psalm with a high encomium of true religion, as the beginning of wisdom, and the best evidence of a well-informed and judicious mind. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.” I shall

I. Illustrate and confirm the declaration in the text;

II. Apply it, in some useful reflections and advices. And do you, my brethren, “consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things!”

I. I shall illustrate and confirm the declaration in the text.

The Psalmist had observed, that “the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom.” It is the foundation of it, and the first step to it. It is also, as the word may signify, the chief, and most excellent wisdom. By “the fear of God” we are to understand an habitual, serious, and reverent regard for him, as the governor and judge of the world, a reverence for his perfections and authority, producing a care to please him, and a dread of his displeasure as the greatest evil. This fear of God is to be manifested by our obedience to his law; it is to show itself in our whole lives. And, to prevent any from supposing that obedience was not included in that expression, the Psalmist adds in the text, “A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.” The words “his commandments” are not in the original; it is, “that do them.” But as his commandments had been mentioned just before the text, our translators have well

supplied the sense. The old translation renders it, "Them that do thereafter," that is, who are influenced by the fear of God, and act agreeably to the dictates of that sacred principle. By "them," or the commandments of God, we are to understand our general duty, as his reasonable creatures; whatever he hath revealed to us as his will, whether by the light of nature or his written word. And it includes a compliance with every moral precept, and every positive institution. As the Psalmist's remark is applicable to us Christians, it comprehends all those duties which the gospel requireth of us. Besides living soberly, righteously, and godly, it requireth faith in Christ, love to him, trust in him, an humble dependence on the help of the Holy Spirit, and a compliance with the institutions of baptism and the Lord's supper, which are commandments of God, as being enjoined by Jesus Christ, who was a teacher sent from him. Doing his commandments implies avoiding every thing that is evil. So we read, "Unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding," Job xxviii. 28. It includes also learning to do well, and practising every duty which God requireth of us. It is not sufficient to study the commandments of God as a science, to understand their meaning and extent, and to be able to explain them with the most critical exactness. It is not sufficient to talk of them, to admire their suitableness and excellency, but we are to do them, to do them sincerely, cheerfully, and constantly, unmoved by any temptations that would lead us to neglect the observance of them. Now they who thus do God's commandments are said to have good understandings, that is, to be wise men. The words in the original are used concerning Abigail; "She was a woman of good understanding," 1 Sam. xxv. 3. She had a clear head and a solid judgment, discerned the difference of things, saw what was good, and what was evil. Her speech and behaviour were influenced by such a judgment, and she conducted her affairs with great prudence and discretion. Thus every good man is indeed a wise man, and no one else deserves that honourable title. It will appear that such have good understandings, from these particulars: they understand the nature of things and the nature and will of God best; they understand this world best; and they understand themselves and their true interest best.

1. They understand the nature of things best, and judge rightly of their essential difference. They are not deceived by vain words, to "call evil good, and good evil; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness." They do not form their judgment upon the opinion and practice of others, and conclude that to be wise and good, which the generality admire and pursue. They do not "judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." They prefer and study those things which are

most valuable in themselves, which have an intrinsic, essential, unalterable worth and excellency in them. Their thoughts are not employed about things above their capacity, and in which therefore they have no concern. They spend not their time about foolish and unlearned questions, dark and mysterious points, and "oppositions of science, falsely so called," but about that which is profitable and useful; that which is the proper wisdom of man. And having proposed to themselves the best ends, they pursue them by suitable and proper means, which is the very essence of wisdom, and the strongest proof of a good understanding. They pursue that, as the business and end of their lives, which is most worthy their pursuit, and will best reward all the labour, pains, and self-denial which it may cost them. Again,

2. They understand the nature and will of God best. So St. John observeth, "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John ii. 3, 4. Good men consider why he gave the world a particular revelation of his will. And they conclude, from his infinite wisdom and goodness, and the circumstances of mankind, that it was not to gratify their curiosity, or employ their speculation, but to enlighten their understandings, sanctify their hearts, regulate their passions, and reform their lives. They show how sensible they are, that the gospel is "a doctrine according to godliness," and that "the end of the commandment is charity, out of a good conscience, and a pure heart, and faith unfeigned;" that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," or debates about mysteries, forms, and ceremonies, and zeal for, or against them; but that it consists in "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is reckoned an evidence of wisdom to understand the constitution and laws of our country. But he is certainly the wisest man, who is obedient to the law; he is the best subject, who "leads a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Thus Moses urgeth obedience to God's laws upon the Israelites, as the best evidence of their wisdom; "Keep them therefore and do them, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people," Deut. iv. 6. Other nations may have more power, wealth, splendour, and politeness, but you will be more wise and honourable than they. Further,

3. Good men understand this world best. They consider it, not as their home and portion, but as a distant land; a school of education; a state of trial for another world. It is reckoned an accomplishment to know the world. They know it best who despise it, and keep their hearts from the love of it; who consider its wealth and pleasures as no further valuable, than as

they may be made some way subservient to their own true happiness, or enable them to promote the happiness of others. They who love it and pursue it, as the main thing, do not know it. They believe it to be solid, substantial, and satisfying, but they are miserably deceived. They know it best, who love it least; and, while they faithfully discharge the duties of life, have their conversation in heaven. Once more,

4. They who do God's commandments, understand themselves and their own interest best. They know, and consider, that they were formed for God; for his service and honour. And therefore their first inquiry is, "Where is God my Maker?" What doth he require of me, and how is his favour to be obtained? They know, from reflecting upon their own natures, that they were not formed to scrape together the riches of earth, to indulge its pleasures, and to gratify every craving appetite. Therefore, while others are "cumbered about many things," their attention is fixed upon the "one thing needful." They know that "to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty and interest of man," and therefore they do this. Others pretend to pursue happiness; but they miss of it, because they seek it where it is not to be found, and forsake the only path that can lead to it. "If thou be wise," saith Solomon, that is, truly religious, "thou shalt be wise for thyself," Prov. ix. 12; thou wilt be the gainer by it. Good men are the only persons who really consult their own interest, who mind the main chance, and pursue true happiness. For nothing is happiness, that doth not extend to the soul as well as the body, and to eternity as well as to time. Would you not call him a fool, who was intent upon cleaning his coat, after a fall, while he took no care to have a broken limb set, or a dangerous wound healed? And is he not a fool, who takes great care of the body and none of the soul? Would you not call him a fool, who was in needy and distressed circumstances, and yet was every day affronting and disobliging those who would otherwise be his friends and benefactors? And is he not a fool, who "loves the praise of men better than the praise of God;" and, to gratify his appetites or increase his substance, offends the almighty Majesty of heaven, "in whose favour is life?" Would you not call him a fool, who declared his expectation of arriving at a southern climate, yet would continue to travel directly north? And is he less so, who hopes to be saved and get to heaven, when he will walk in "the broad way that leadeth to destruction?" So foolish and ignorant are all wicked men! If the truth in the text needed any further confirmation, I might allege the testimony of scripture at large. There sin and folly, wisdom and religion, are used as synonymous terms, or words of the same signification. Sin is called "folly in Israel." Extravagant, debauched young men are called, "young men void of understanding." And God fre-

quently complains of his degenerate people, that they were a nation "void of understanding;" that there was "no understanding in them;" as if there were no other wisdom or folly in the world but virtue and vice. Particularly David saith, "I have more understanding than all my teachers; I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts," Ps. cxix. 99. When Saul was acknowledging to David his great sin in hunting for his life, he doth it in these expressive words, "I have played the fool and erred exceedingly," 1 Sam. xxvi. 21. The same representation is made in the New Testament. Christ saith, "Whosoever heareth and doeth these sayings of mine, I will liken him to a wise man that built his house upon a rock," which stood firm amidst the greatest tempests: but he who doeth them not shall be likened to "a foolish man who built his house upon the sand," and it quickly fell to the ground, Matt. vii. 24, &c. St. James saith, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom," James iii. 13. Thus doth it appear, that they who keep the commandments of God have a good understanding, and are indeed the only wise men, for they understand the nature of things, and the nature and will of God, best; they have formed the best judgment of this world and the things of it; and they understand themselves and their own true interest better than any of those who are destitute of the fear of God, and break his commandments. Having illustrated and confirmed the instructive truth in the text, I proceed,

II. *To apply it in some useful reflections and advices.*

1. Let us be thankful for the divine commandments, which are adapted to exalt us to such dignity and felicity. This thought David suggests to us, when he adds after the text, "His praise endureth for ever." Let him be for ever praised, who hath given us such laws; so plain and so excellent; and put us in so fair a way of being happy for ever. We read, in the books of the ancient heathen, a great deal about their wise men, their philosophers, or lovers of wisdom. But, tried by the test in the text, they were in general "a people void of understanding." St. Paul, who well knew them and their history and writings, observeth that "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; because when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but held the truth in unrighteousness," Rom. i. 21, &c. Let us bless God for a better system of divine truth, and a clearer rule of duty, than they enjoyed. And let us "love his commandments above gold, yea above fine gold; yea, esteem the law of his mouth better to us than thousands of gold and silver." Let us daily give him thanks for the holy scriptures; for this reason especially, because they are adapted to make us "wiser than the ancients," Ps. cxix. 100, yea, "are able to make

us wise to salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Tim. iii. 15.

2. We may hence learn to judge, who are truly wise, and have good understandings. My text is a very bold, but a very just censure upon a great part of mankind; for it pronounceth them fools. If none have good understandings but they who do God's commandments, alas! what a great many fools there are in the world! I fear there are many princes, and nobles, and senators, who, in this respect, have no understanding. There is too much reason to believe, that some are really fools, though they are great critics; publish learned commentaries upon ancient authors, and even upon scripture itself; who write ingenious books and preach excellent sermons. Many who will talk well upon politics and trade; who are notable men for this world; have heads to contrive, and resolution and prudence to execute wise schemes; and know how to thrive and get rich, are yet fools. "So," saith Christ, "is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God;" that is, he is a fool, Luke xii. 21. They have no mental riches; to do good they have no knowledge. Some who well understand, and know how to cure, the disorders of the body, know not "the plague of their own hearts," nor "the first principles of the oracles of God," 1 Kings viii. 38; Heb. v. 12; but have very corrupted and diseased souls. Others can speak eloquently upon a difficult point of law, can discern an error in a deed or a fraud in an agreement, yet can see nothing amiss in themselves, but are among the lawless, the foolish, and abominable in the sight of God. There are many ladies, who shine brightest in polite assemblies; who are admired for their personal charms, their dress, their wit, and genteel behaviour, yet are fools; because they are enemies to God by wicked works; strangers to the leading truths and duties of Christianity, and "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." On the other hand, there are many in the lowest ranks of life; persons of no education or breeding; strangers to wealth and honour, politeness and complaisance; yet are some of the wisest men in the world; because most under the influence of the fear of God, and most steady and constant in the practice of his commandments. Their intellectuals in other respects may be weak; but they "know God and Jesus Christ," and that is "eternal life," John xvii. 3. They will pray with the ardour of an angel, and sacrifice any thing to the favour of God and a good conscience. Though they cannot learnedly defend and plead for religion, they do more; they recommend it by a holy life; and, if called out to it, they will readily and cheerfully die for it. A glorious figure these men will make in the future world, however they may be despised or overlooked in this! In short, "he understands religion well, who learns from it what it is to be just and good, and derives from it courage enough to dare to

be so." "I will never," saith a pious writer, * "take that man for a fool, who can hit the way to heaven, nor him for a wise man, who misseth it." Let this teach us who are most to be esteemed and valued; not the rich, the mighty, the noble, and the learned, if they break the commandments of God; but those, however poor and mean, who keep them. In the eyes of a good man, "a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord," Ps. xv. 4. "All they that do his commandments," saith the text, be they ever so low, and ever so much despised, are wise men; the best members of society, and most honourable in the eyes of God and of all good beings. Let this teach us also, not to value ourselves upon wealth and honour, or upon, what is greatly preferable, even intellectual endowments. For nothing but true religion will secure a man from the imputation of egregious folly. And the greater his wealth, honour, and accomplishments in other respects are, he will only become a richer prey to Satan, and increase the triumphs of hell. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man in his might, nor the rich man in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord," Jer. ix. 23, 24.

3. Here is the true test of orthodoxy. A hard word, brethren, but a very common and a very mischievous one. The thing is much talked of, but little understood. The word properly signifies right thinking, or judging; having a right belief of religious articles; or having a good understanding of them. Some say they are orthodox, because they think just as their fathers did; or as this or that man or church doth. And they esteem others heretical and wicked, because they have not the same sentiments as themselves. I think the text plainly intimates, that every good man is orthodox, and every wicked man is a heretic. Truth of thought, or thinking rightly of points of divinity, or articles of faith, is undoubtedly a matter of importance. But as to the main sentiments, every good man is sound. No one who doeth God's commandments will err fundamentally, so as to endanger his salvation. An ungodly, carnal, worldly man, is clearly and lamentably erroneous. Accordingly, St. Paul having reminded Titus, that the Cretians, among whom he then was, were liars, passionate, and lazy gluttons, commands him to "rebuken them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," Titus i. 12, 13; intimating plainly, that they were not orthodox while they were vicious. This shows how absurd it is, to prefer sound notions to a good heart and a holy life; how dangerous it is for men to trust to right apprehensions of Christian doctrines, while they break the commandments of God. What signifieth it for a man to be ortho-

* Baxter.

dox in his opinion, and zealous against error and schism; and at the same time it must be said of him, "He is an ill-natured man; a man of violent passions; selfish, proud, and given to lying and shuffling; he will be frequently drunk; he makes no conscience of his dealings, and is uncharitable and bitter to all that differ from him?" There is no error or heresy so opposite to the gospel as a wicked life. "There are many," saith Mr. Flavel, "who hate doctrinal errors, yet perish by practical ones; who hate false doctrine, yet perish by a false heart." Let those then who boast of their soundness or their wisdom, while their lives are wicked, attend to those words of the prophet; "How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us, while you continue disobedient, covetous, and practise abomination?" "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken; lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them?" Jer. viii. 8, 9, &c. I mention these circumstances so particularly, because it is so common and so easy to substitute notions, forms, and ceremonies, instead of obedience to the commands of God. It is easier to profess and contend for unintelligible doctrines, and to abound in ceremonies and bodily devotion, than to improve the mind and regulate the manners. "It is easier to go a pilgrimage, or to stroll about the world, than to renounce and correct one bad habit. It is easier for a man to whip himself than to mend himself; and to tell his beads than to quit his vices. It is easier to talk, or hear others talk, all day long about Christ and about faith and grace, than to forgive injuries and be chaste and pure in heart. There may be a strong passion for trifling ceremonies and pious frauds; a warm zeal to make proselytes to a party, and to censure, slander, and punish all who are called heretics; without amendment of life; without renouncing inordinate affection; and indeed without one grain of common honesty."* Let this teach us how to judge of others. Would you know whether they are wise and orthodox? Look into their lives; examine what devotion, purity, integrity, sobriety, candour, benevolence, and patience appear there; and if they keep the commandments of God, you may be sure they hold no fundamental error. This is our Lord's own rule, "By their fruits ye shall know them," Matt. vii. 20.

4. Let us all make it our great care and business to do the commandments of God. Let us study this as the most important branch of science; mind this as the great concern of human life. Here let your labour and zeal be employed. Then God, who is a perfect judge of wisdom and excellency, will approve you. All who are truly wise among men will esteem you. Yea, such a charm is there in a religious conduct, that wicked men will inwardly esteem you, though they may pretend to despise

* Jortin.

you, and call you enthusiastic, weak, and cowardly. Let it be your care then, brethren, to “sanctify the Lord of hosts in your hearts, and be in his fear all the day long;” to “delight yourselves greatly in his commandments;” to “esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right,” and to “hate every false way.” For “happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth” this “understanding; for the gain thereof is better than fine gold, and all things that thou canst desire are not to be compared to her.” “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” “His commandments are not grievous, and in keeping of them there is great reward.” Thus it is declared, by the highest authority, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the heavenly city,” Rev. xxii. 14.

DISCOURSE XXVII.

JEREMIAH'S OBSERVATION CONCERNING THE IGNORANCE OF THE POOR, AND THE INSOLENCE OF THE GREAT.

JEREMIAH V. 4, 5.

Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish; for they know not the way of Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds.

As the different ranks and conditions of life have their peculiar snares and temptations, it is the duty of Christian ministers to make a plain and faithful representation of these to their hearers, and to caution them against “the sins that easily beset them.” This is needful, that the wise design of providence in placing men in different conditions of life may not be counteracted, nor those services to society hindered, of which they are respectively capable. This will be my chief design, brethren, in considering the subject now before us. The prophet Jeremiah intimates, that he had preached to the people of Israel, and admonished them; but all in vain. “They had refused to receive correction” and instruction, “had hardened their faces and refused to return” to God, as he observes in the preceding verse. He therefore set himself to inquire, what was the cause of their obstinacy and disobedience: and he thought it might be this; that the persons to whom he had chiefly addressed, were the poor, and that their ignorance hindered their improvement of his instructions. He therefore addressed himself to the great men;

but found no better success among them; owing, not to their ignorance, but their wilfulness and obstinacy. "Therefore I said, These are poor; they are foolish; for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God; but these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds." This hath been too much the case in every succeeding age, and the Lord's ministers have seen reason to adopt Jeremiah's remark.

Let me consider the character of many of the poor and great as they are here described; illustrate the causes of their respective disobedience to the divine commands; and then suggest to you the proper improvement of this subject.

I. Let me consider the character of many of the poor as here described.

Seeing them impudent in sin, and unreformed by the judgments of God, Jeremiah said, "Surely these are poor; they are foolish," or act foolishly, that is, wickedly; and the reason is, "they know not the way of Lord, nor the judgment of their God." Their obstinacy in sin was owing to their ignorance; and their ignorance was in a great measure occasioned by their poverty. This was the best excuse he could make for them.

1. Their obstinacy in sin was owing to their ignorance; their ignorance of God and divine things and the concerns of their souls; the principal objects with which rational creatures should be solicitous to gain an acquaintance. "They knew not the way of the Lord," that is, religion. They were ignorant of the way in which he had directed them to walk; were unacquainted with his laws and commands; at least with their purity and extent, the sanctions by which they were enforced, the blessings promised to the obedient, and the curses denounced against the disobedient. Whatever they knew of the world, or their several employments in life, they knew little or nothing of religion. They were likewise unacquainted with "the judgments of their God;" which, as distinguished from the former, may signify his providences; the design of his several dispensations to them; particularly the afflictions with which he had visited them. They did not observe and own his hand in the calamities brought upon them; nor seriously consider, why he had contended with them: but were as stupid and insensible, as if they had no rational faculties; and all this, though, as is intimated in the text, they called the Lord their God, and professed relation and devotedness to him. Ignorance, my brethren, is still the source of error and sin. When men have no clear, distinct ideas of God and religion, of their own souls and a future state, it is no wonder that they act amiss. They misapprehend the nature of God; think him such an one as themselves; and presume upon

his mercy without regarding him as the righteous governor of the world, and considering the terms on which his mercy is promised. They have a general idea of Christ, as a Saviour; but do not understand or attend to the nature of that salvation, of which he is the author. They fix their minds upon some particular parts of the gospel, without considering the whole of it; and are ignorant that it is "a doctrine according to godliness." "The light that is in them is darkness;" and what can be expected from them but works of darkness? Their ignorance in a great measure defeats the end of preaching to them, or conversing with them; because they can scarce understand the plainest language. Hence some of them fall into the most absurd errors and licentious practices, and continue in them without shame. They contract a dull, hardened spirit; they refuse instruction, and even affliction makes no impression upon them. Accordingly the apostle observes of the heathen, that "their understandings were darkened, and they were alienated from the life of God," a divine holy life, "through the ignorance that was in them, and so they worked uncleanness with greediness," Eph. iv. 18. And he represents it as the leading design of the gospel, "to open men's eyes, and turn them from darkness to light." Further,

2. The prophet intimates that their ignorance was in a great measure occasioned by their poverty. This contributed to it many ways. The ignorance or narrow circumstances of their parents might prevent their having a good education. Many of the poor seldom take any pains about their children's minds; are not concerned that they should learn to read, and have good principles instilled into them. They are not careful to inform them of God, of his providence, of the gospel and a future state. What notions these young souls gain of such important subjects, they generally pick up by chance. They are not formed to a habit of thinking and of reflecting upon what they see and hear. Thus their understanding lies neglected, and so is overrun with prejudices and follies. When they begin to think and judge a little for themselves, all their thoughts and cares are employed about the world, as they are obliged to work hard and incessantly for their support. Hence they live without prayer, and reading the scriptures, if they are capable of it, and God is not in all their thoughts. Some of them will not come to the house of God, for want of such a dress as their vanity thinks needful, or if they do come, "hearing they understand not, and seeing they perceive not." Their faculties rust for want of exercise, and their thoughts are hardly capable of being fixed to serious attention. They generally associate with persons of their own disposition and character, from whom they are likely to hear nothing that savours of religion, and who encourage one another in the contempt or neglect of it. Hence they come to

lose all regard to decency and reputation, and, having no character to forfeit, they sin impudently, and glory in their shame. Yea, to such a degree of stupidity are many of this rank sunk, that they think religion doth not concern them, that the knowledge of it is too deep for any but men of better education and genius, and the practice of it only suited to men of fortune and leisure. This was the case of most of the poor in Israel in Jeremiah's time. Yet their ignorance was inexcusable, considering that they lived in a land of light, and had greater advantages than any other part of the world, for knowledge and piety. This is the case of many of the poor in Britain. Among the lower mechanics, manufacturers, and labourers, there is a most stupid and lamentable ignorance of the most important particulars relating to God, their souls, and eternity. Let us now consider,

II. *The character of the great men, as described in the text.*

The gentry, persons of a higher rank. Now, as opposed to the poor, it must not only refer to men of honourable birth, large fortunes, and considerable learning, but to those whose circumstances were easy, whose minds had been early cultivated, who had capacity and leisure to apply themselves to the knowledge of divine things, in short, to all who could not properly be ranked among the poor; "I will get me to the great men," saith the prophet, "and speak to them;" I will see what I can make of them, what good I can do among them. Now observe, the prophet found that they had a better knowledge of religion than the poor; yet acted as bad as they, or worse, and this was very much owing to their greatness.

I. They had a better knowledge of religion than the poor. "They have known the way of the Lord and the judgment of their God;" they had enjoyed a better education than the poor. Pains had been taken to open and improve their understandings. They had been taught to read, received instruction at home, and been early brought to the house of God. Useful books had been put into their hands. They had been kept from learning the language and manners of the vulgar, and had conversed with those who were persons of sense and breeding. They had not only attained a general knowledge of the world, and made some proper observations upon what passed in it, but they had some knowledge of religion too. They understood its theory, knew some things to be evil, which the poor scarcely suspected to be so, and some things to be base and shameful, which they gloried in. Being free from those cares and anxieties about a livelihood, which oppressed the poor, their minds were easy and cheerful, which is a great help to improvement in knowledge. And by what they had attained, they would see how much room there was, and how pleasant and desirable it

was, to improve. There was more hope, therefore, in the prophet's addressing to them : they could better enter into his reasoning and manner of address, and were men of so much civility and good manners, that they would at least give him a patient and respectful hearing. Nevertheless,

2. They acted as bad as the poor, or worse. For they were wilfully and insolently wicked. "They have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds;" an allusion to headstrong, refractory oxen, that will not bear the yoke, but struggle and break it. Religion is often represented to us in scripture as a yoke, which is taken upon the shoulders, as a bond upon the soul, that is, men ought to submit to the restraints of reason and conscience; to the authority of the law of God, and be obedient to his commands. It is their duty to restrain their appetites and passions, and to keep within the bounds which God had prescribed.

But those great men would "walk in the way of their hearts and in the sight of their eyes," though they knew it was wrong. They would not be subject to the law of God, and whatever light there might be in their understandings, their wills were perverse, their affections misplaced, and their hearts unsanctified.

They would not submit to the reproofs of the prophet, and very likely took it ill, that they should be admonished, or even suspected of that which was evil. Thus they offered violence to reason and conscience, shook off the principles and restraints of their education, and, as it is expressed by the Psalmist, "broke the bands of the Lord asunder, and cast his cords from them," Ps. ii. 5. Now to what was it owing that their knowledge did not influence their practice? that men of sense were capable of behaving so ill? The prophet intimates in the text that,

3. It was chiefly owing to their greatness; just as the ignorance of the former sort was owing to their poverty. Men who are in plentiful circumstances, especially those who are grown rich from mean beginnings, are very apt to be lifted up with pride. This leads them to treat others with contempt, to resent the admonitions of the Lord's prophets, and despise the judgment of all who are not so rich, great, or learned as themselves. Many of this class think that strict religion is only fit for the vulgar, to keep them in order, and that persons of rank and fortune are not to be tied down to its rules, nor bound to observe them any further than suits their convenience and pleasure. They think it unbecoming a well-bred man, and one that knows the world, to show a public, serious reverence for his Maker, and be exact and punctual in obeying his laws, and complying with his institutions. Worldly things have a mischievous influence upon their hearts. Because their circumstances are easy, they grow careless and inconsiderate; contract

a levity of spirit, a dissipation of thought, and neglect all serious reflection. Others, who do not proceed so far as this, are only intent upon increasing their substance, or gratifying their appetites, or indulging their pleasures, and running into all the amusements and vanities of the age. Much of their time and thought is taken up with the forms and ceremonies of the world, with visits, dress, and fashion, so that they have neither leisure nor hearts to reflect upon what they know. They have no relish for serious consideration, conversing with the scriptures, or other grave and useful subjects. Because they are flattered and complimented by others, they forget the most High, or pay homage to him in a very formal, trifling manner. Their desire to be like others and follow the fashion makes them ashamed of sober singularity. With a view to recommend themselves to the favour of the polite world, they comply with the general taste, even when they know it to be corrupt. They appear ashamed of religious discourse, of family worship, a strict regard to the sabbath and other divine institutions, because these are unfashionable. Thus they mind earthly things, and neglect to cultivate those moral, pious dispositions, which show true greatness of soul. Accordingly we find that the prophets, the apostles, yea even Christ himself, met with their chief opposition from the great men, the learned, and the rich. This is too much the case down to the present day, and it is very much owing to their greatness. Having thus considered the description the prophet gives us of the poor and the great, and shown whence it arises, that the former are in general so ignorant, and the latter so wilful, let us derive instruction from this subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *Learn what is the most important and profitable knowledge ;* namely, to "know the way of the Lord and the judgment of our God." Solomon observes, that "for the soul to be without knowledge is not good." There is curiosity and a desire to know implanted in the human mind, and it is capable of everlasting improvement in knowledge. Let us learn, then, upon what subjects our minds should be principally employed, and what kind of knowledge we should be most ambitious to gain. Now "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." It is desirable to understand our respective callings ; to be skilful and sagacious in our several occupations. But religion is the "one thing needful." To know distinctly "the way of God," in which we are to walk, the worth of our souls, their danger by sin, to know Christ and him crucified ; this is the noblest science, and no other is to be compared with it. Labour therefore to "get wisdom, and with all your gettings to get understanding." Learn likewise what is the most important and useful know-

ledge to teach your children; not to know the world, as that phrase is commonly understood, for it is generally a mischievous knowledge: but to know God and themselves, their duty and their true interest. Your business is to teach them "the way of the Lord, and the judgment of God," and train them up in that way; to teach them "the holy scriptures, which are able to make them wise to salvation." It should be your business, Christian parents, like Abraham, to "command your children and household to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment," Gen. xviii. 19.

2. *Learn the advantage of being placed in the middle condition of life.* The poor are generally ignorant and the rich insolent; and so many of both ranks are wicked. They have therefore reason to be thankful to providence, who are neither rich nor poor, but have a comfortable competency, and so are free from the snares of poverty and of riches. The poor have some civil advantages above the rich, and the rich some above the poor; but those have most advantages for religion who are in the middle state. A desire and diligence to be raised above the reproach and temptations of poverty is commendable; but to be ambitious to be very rich and great is criminal. To be never satisfied; to be perpetually toiling; grasping at every thing; eagerly pursuing every scheme to be wealthy, is fatal to the life of religion, and "drowns men in destruction and perdition." Let us learn, then, "having food and raiment, to be therewith content;" never envying those above us; for they may be more the children of disobedience and of hell, the higher their rank and greatness are. And let us be often adopting that wise and excellent prayer of Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain," Prov. xxx. 8.

3. *Learn what an excellent charity it is, to furnish the poor with the means of knowledge;* since their ignorance is the general source of their vices. In this view, I cannot but recommend to your countenance and encouragement charity-schools. In them the children of many ignorant, careless parents are taught to read, and learn a catechism, and instructed in the principles of religion. When servants come untaught and undisciplined into our families, it is our duty to do what we can to inform their understandings and regulate their conduct; by conversing with them, and reading to them; by setting them upon reading the scriptures and other good books, especially on a Lord's day. It should be our practice also to put some plain, short, useful treatises into the hands of our poor workmen and neighbours, and exhort them to read. A few shillings spent this way will turn to a better account at the great day, than hundreds and thousands of pounds, hoarded up for your families, or spent in the pomps

and elegancies of life. Yet I fear some wealthy tradesmen and farmers, though they employ many workmen and servants, never give them bibles, or small practical treatises. To this let me add, that the poor should be exhorted and encouraged by their superiors to attend public worship; and ministers should preach to them in the plainest manner, and not starve their souls out of compliment to the great and the learned.* In this connexion I cannot but lament the too general neglect of ministers to catechise the children of their congregations; especially those of the poor and the ignorant. To this neglect, I apprehend, it is very much owing, that they are so unsteady in their religious principles, so irregular in their attendance with those societies of Christians to which they profess to belong, and act in so many other instances contrary to the rules of the gospel.† By such labours of love as these, God will be well pleased; you will resemble Christ, who “went about doing good:” and if the poor, for whose happiness you are concerned, should prove ungrateful and untractable, your work shall not go unrewarded. Let me address,

4. *To the poor.* Some have been born and bred in ignorant irreligious families, and know very little of “the way of the Lord.” As far as your education hath been bad, or opportunities wanting, you are much to be pitied; but your ignorance cannot be excused. “There is a spirit in man.” You have capacities to discern good and evil. Conscience tells you, in general, what you ought to do and to avoid. You know you have souls to be saved, and the way of salvation is marked out very plain and clear. You have bibles in your hands. Your ministers labour (and it is not a small labour) to come down to your capacities, and address to your consciences and feelings. So that if you will continue ignorant of God and divine things, the fault is your own. There are others, not above you in rank or capacity, and without superior advantages, who have a large experimental knowledge of religion; such a serious spirit, and zeal to do good, as hath often humbled and shamed me. Be ambitious,

* Dr. Manton, being to preach before the lord-mayor, aldermen, &c. of London, chose a subject on which he could display his learning and judgment. After the service, a poor man said to him, “Sir, I hoped to get some good to my soul by your preaching to-day. But I was disappointed; for I could understand little of what you said: you were quite above me.” The doctor replied with tears, “Friend, if I did not give you a sermon, you have given me one; and by the grace of God, I will never play the fool to preach so again.”

† “What may be the reason why so many now-a-days are carried about with every wind of doctrine, and some to every point of the compass round about? Surely it is because they were never well catechised in the principles of religion. Oh for the ancient and primitive ordinance of catechising. Every youth can preach; but he must be a man indeed, who can profitably catechise. Sermons are like whole joints for men to manage; but catechising, being shred into questions and answers, is fit for children to eat, and easy for them to digest; while the minister may also enlarge and dilute himself on both, as he seeth just occasion, for the edification of those of riper years.” Thomas Fuller’s *Contemplations*, No. 49.

then, to grow wiser and better, and do not be the devil's poor, who will take no pains about religion, but live and die like brutes. They spend their sabbaths in idleness or pleasure, and that money in public houses, or in fantastic dress, which should furnish them and their families with bibles and prayer-books. To be wilfully ignorant is a great, inexcusable crime. "The servant that knew not his Lord's will shall be beaten with stripes," because he might have known it. It is "for lack of knowledge," that God's people perish; and Christ will come to take vengeance upon them that know not God." Let me urge you, therefore, to give yourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer; and especially to improve the Lord's-day in such employments. You seldom need exercise or diversion for health. Reading, reflection, and prayer, ought to be your recreation; on the Lord's day especially. If you pray to God to enlighten your understandings, and teach you knowledge, he will do it; and in the use of these means you may be made "wise unto salvation." I hope you will take this friendly advice; as it is given you out of a sincere love to your souls, which are as valuable in themselves, and as dear to me, as the souls of the great. And I hope that you will give me no reason to complain, with the prophet, that you are "poor and foolish," and that all instructions are thrown away upon you. I will, in the last place, after Jeremiah's example, get me,

5. *To the great men*, and speak unto them; that is, to all of you who are not poor, though you may not, in the language of the present day, be called great; and I hope with better success than the prophet had. Some of you are rich in this world; some are men of parts and learning; many of you are persons of leisure, and might have more for religion, if you were not too eager about the world. I hope you "know the way of the Lord, and the judgments of God;" though I must own that there is a criminal, shameful ignorance of religion and the scriptures, in many who are well acquainted with trade, history, and the way of the world. However, you have a superior knowledge of religion to most of the poor. You have, or may have, time for improving your understandings and bettering your spirit, by reading, prayer, reflection, and conversation with the wise and good. Now let me seriously ask you, "What do you more than others?" Your greatness, wealth, or competency,—your knowledge, privileges, and authority over others, are all talents given you of God. And what improvements have you made of them? What advancement have you made in religion? What good have you done to the bodies and souls of others? Are you bearing God's yoke, or have you cast it off? Do you hold his bonds close to you, and rejoice to be in them? Or do they hang loose about you; ready to be cast off whenever your worldly interest or pleasure come in competition with them? Consider, my friends,

are not God's restraints perfectly reasonable? Is it not fit that you should submit to the dictates of reason and conscience, and control those appetites, passions, and desires, which contradict them? That you should be examples of sobriety, goodness, charity, and heavenly-mindedness to all about you? Consider, likewise, that Christ's "yoke is easy and his burden light; that his commandments are not grievous;" and that the ways of the Lord, which you know, are "ways of pleasantness and paths of peace." You are sensible that you never seriously worship God, restrain any irregular desire, or do a worthy, charitable action, but it gives you pleasure; that you never burst the bonds of conscience, but it hurts your souls, and breaks your peace; that you cannot but reflect upon it, as acting unworthy a great man, yea a common man, or rational being. If you will break God's bonds asunder, run madly after the world, and neglect your duty, remember, you "have no cloak for your sin," John xv. 22. You will go from bad to worse, be held in the fetters of iniquity, and, though you gain the whole world, will lose your own souls. Besides all this, consider what a fatal influence your example will have upon others; upon your poor neighbours, workmen, and servants. You constitute a kind of fashion; and they will be glad of your example to countenance them in their iniquities. If you (to mention only one instance) trifle away the sabbath, spend some of your sacred time in visiting, walking abroad, or at genteeler public houses, or in idle chat at home, they will naturally ask, Why may not we go to the ale-house, or to this or the other diversion? "Woe be to the man," saith our Lord, "by whom the offence cometh." Guard, therefore, against the temptations of your rank and station; and earnestly pray that God would give you pious, sound, and humble minds. I conclude with urging this one argument more, upon the poor and the great men, yea upon all of you, whatever your condition in life be: namely, that very soon all these distinctions will be at an end. At death the rich and the poor meet together. "In the grave there are the small and the great," the master and his servant, the lady and her waiting-maid. But that is not all. At the day of judgment "the dead, small and great," shall stand before the bar of Christ, and be judged according to the deeds done in the body. And if they have been wicked, whether through obstinacy or through ignorance, whether they are great or small, rich or poor, mighty or weak, bond or free, "they will call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" Rev. vi. 15—17.

DISCOURSE XXVIII.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DISTRACTION CONSIDERED AND IMPROVED.

DANIEL IV. 33.

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar ; and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

THE great God, in order to describe his own power, calls upon Job, to "behold every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud and bring him low, and tread down the wicked in their place ; then will I confess unto thee, that thine own right hand can save thee," Job xl. 11 ; thereby intimating, that it is the prerogative, or peculiar glory of God, to humble proud oppressors ; and that one look of his eye can bring them down. We have a remarkable instance of this in the history to which the text refers : even that of the distraction of Nebuchadnezzar the great and mighty king of Babylon : one of the most astonishing events that ever happened, and worthy of our attentive regard ! The history of it is contained in this chapter. And what makes it more remarkable is, that it was drawn up by the king himself after his recovery. While he was under the impression of the divine power and goodness, he published a proclamation, directed "to all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth ; in order to show the signs and wonders, that the high God had wrought towards him," and to magnify his power, justice, and goodness, though at the same time he published his own shame. For the illustration of this affecting event, I shall consider,

I. The calamity itself ;

II. The cause of it ;

And then show what instructive lessons we may learn from it. Let us consider,

I. *The calamity itself.*

In order to show how awful and remarkable this was, it will be necessary a little to consider the dignity of this monarch, and the state of his affairs. Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, the capital city of the Chaldean empire. He had been engaged in successful wars, against the Tyrians, the Jews, and other neighbouring nations. He had overrun almost all Asia, and carried his arms into Africa. He had brought the Chaldean empire to the highest pitch of power and grandeur, and enriched his capital with the plunder of all the neighbouring nations. Babylon had been an ancient city ; but this king had so enlarged and beautified it, that it became one of the wonders of the

world. He built the walls of the city, which were sixty miles round ; about twenty yards thick ; about a hundred feet high ; and had in them a hundred gates of solid brass. Besides this, he had built a grand temple to his god Belus, and a most magnificent palace, which was strongly fortified. He had contrived some curious hanging gardens, consisting of terraces, one sloping above another, till they were as high as the walls of the city ; the whole being eight miles in compass. These and many other grand designs for the beauty and strength of his capital, this monarch had executed. While he was " at rest in his house and flourishing in his palace," he had a dream which troubled him. He saw a stately tree, fair and fruitful, affording shelter and food to the beasts and birds. He saw an angel coming from heaven, and commanding it to be cut down. Nevertheless the stump was to continue in the earth, till seven times, that is, seven years, had passed over it ; and then it was to recover its former height, glory, and fruitfulness. The wise men of Babylon could not explain this dream ; but the prophet Daniel gave the king the interpretation. He told him that it represented himself ; and described his greatness and dominion ; that its being cut down intimated that he should be dethroned by the immediate hand of God, lose his understanding, be driven from men, and become like a brute ; till he knew that the most High ruleth ; and that then he should perfectly recover his senses and his kingdom. The prophet concludeth his interpretation with giving him good advice, to be humble and penitent, to do justice and show mercy. It was twelve months after this dream, before the calamity came upon him. So long the patience of God waited with him ! Then, as he walked in his palace, and boasted of his great achievements, there came a voice from heaven ratifying the sentence already past upon him. " The same hour it was fulfilled ; he was driven from men," and became and lived like a brute. He lost his understanding and memory at once ; was incapable of governing the kingdom, or even of human converse. Not one trace of his former grandeur, rank, or rationality remained. And (as it is expressed in verse 16), " his heart was changed from man's, and a beast's heart was given to him." He had no more sense than a brute ; he ran wild and shunned the society of mankind. He probably ran into a park near his palace, was agitated by all the desires and affections of brutes, and imitated their voice and motions. His courtiers, (perceiving that it was the hand of Providence which had thus debased him, and expecting from Daniel's interpretation of the dream, that this distraction would continue seven years,) left him to wander there, and put the kingdom under a regency. And there is still remaining a fragment of a Chaldean historian, who gives an account of an interregnum occasioned by his distraction. In this miserable condition he continued

seven years, under the immediate care of Providence, represented by a band of iron and brass round the stump of the tree to preserve it from being destroyed. Let us consider,

II. *The cause of this calamity.*

And that was his pride. This vice provoked God to make him such a miserable spectacle. While he was walking in his palace, most probably in those hanging gardens before mentioned, and upon the highest terrace of them, from whence he had a full prospect of the whole city, he proudly boasted of his great works; saying, perhaps to some of his courtiers, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (v. 30.) Babylon was the grandest city in the world. It is called in the prophecies, "great Babylon," the "glory of kingdoms," the "golden city," the "lady of kingdoms," the "praise of the whole earth." This unhappy monarch was strutting about contemplating its grandeur, and thinking himself a god, surveying the glories of his own creation, when this mortifying change came upon him. He ascribed all his victories and successes, all his dignity and wealth, to himself; and would not acknowledge that "the most High ruled among the kingdoms of men." He thought himself superior to the gods of Babylon, and those of all the nations which he had conquered, and even Jehovah himself. Thus it is described by Isaiah, "Thou hast said in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High," Isa. xiv. 13. Then was his pride brought low. In this distracted condition, he lived abroad in the fields; eating grass like oxen, and lodging on the ground like them, "till his hair was grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." At the end of seven years, his understanding and reason returned to him. He was restored to his kingdom; "his counsellors and lords sought unto him" (v. 36), and his former majesty and honour were re-established. Hence being made fully sensible of the almighty power and universal dominion of the most High, he, by a public decree, acknowledged it through his vast empire, and magnified divine mercy in his restoration. He lived about a year after this; and one would hope he kept in this good mind, and died under the serious impression of these important truths. And it was happy for him to have lost his senses for a time, if it was the means of saving his soul. Having thus viewed this very affecting and miserable spectacle, let us receive instruction from it; and endeavour to enter into the following useful reflections upon this surprising event.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us reverence the almighty power of God, so illustriously displayed in it.* "Where the word of a king is," saith Solomon, "there is power." Nebuchadnezzar's royal word had been accompanied with power to raise the grandeur of Babylon, and to conquer and impoverish whole nations. But when the royal word of the King of kings "fell from heaven saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom is departed from thee; the same hour was the thing fulfilled" (v. 31). And all his wise counsellors, skilful physicians, and mighty forces, could neither prevent nor remove the affliction. How easily can God bring down the highest! He, as a sacred writer expresseth it, "maketh the judges fools, looseth the bond (or sword) of kings, leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. He taketh away the understanding of the aged. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty," Job xii. 17, &c. See how easily God can destroy the brightest genius, and confound the most subtle politician. This story is a glorious and everlasting proof of his supremacy and irresistible power. In this view let us consider it, and reverence the almighty God. Nebuchadnezzar takes pains to inculcate these ideas of God upon all to whom this decree is made known. This calamity was sent upon him "to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (v. 32). We are to learn from it, that "the heavens do rule;" that God who sitteth in them, governeth the world, and employs his angels to preside over its affairs (v. 26). Let us then, with Nebuchadnezzar, "lift up our eyes to heaven, and bless the most High, and praise and honour him that liveth for ever; whose dominion is an everlasting dominion; all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (v. 34.) Let us, with Nebuchadnezzar, "praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven; all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment" (v. 37). Such exhortations come with peculiar force upon the mind, as still in effect given by this mighty monarch; and these acknowledgments ought to have the greatest weight with us, as extorted from him by this awful calamity, and so gloriously illustrated by it. "God ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations; he cutteth off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth," Ps. lxxvi. 12.

2. *See how abominable pride is in the sight of God.* It is the observation of a noble writer,* that this story is one of the finest,

* Lord Orrery.

most humbling, and most instructive lessons to human vanity, that ever was exhibited to it. It shows how detestable pride is in the sight of God, and informs us (they are Nebuchadnezzar's own words) that "those who walk in pride, God is able to abase." So his royal proclamation concludes; and it is a truth that we should never forget. "Pride was not made for man." It is unreasonable and absurd for a creature weak, dependent, and sinful, to be proud, a creature who derives all from God, owes every thing to him, and lives and moves and hath his being in him. The scripture informs us, that God "hateth a proud look;" and that "every one who is proud in heart is an abomination to him." This history shows us at once, how offensive it is to him, and how easily he can lay it low. Let it teach us "not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but think soberly," to guard our hearts from arrogant thoughts and conceit of ourselves, and keep our tongues from any expressions which may betray the pride of our hearts. There are other instances of the loss of understanding, besides this of Nebuchadnezzar, which are very mortifying to human vanity; instances where the faculties decayed by age, and where there appeared no immediate hand of Providence in them. Are you proud of your wit and sprightly parts? Think of Swift; who having been generally admired for them, though in some instances he had abused them to vilify human nature, insult our present happy establishment, and ridicule many serious and exemplary Christians, became at last a mere child, had not the sense of a brute to feed himself, and was shown by his servants, for gain, as a curiosity. Are you proud of great learning and profound skill in the sciences? Think of Swisset, a celebrated German mathematician; of whom it was said by his learned contemporaries, that "his capacities were almost above human." Yet in the advance of life he lost his understanding so far, that he could scarce count twenty, and used to weep because he could not understand the arguments and demonstrations which he had published. Are you proud of honour, courage, conduct, and high reputation? Think of the great Duke of Marlborough, * who after he had been, for so many years, the pride of England, the terror of France, and wonder of Europe, became an idiot, and had not understanding sufficient to perform the common actions of life. Are you proud of wealth and power; your buildings, equipages, and attendants; the numbers who are submissive and obedient to you? Think of Nebuchadnezzar. Go in your imagination to the fields

* From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow,
And Swift expires a driv'ler and a show;
Examples of the mind's extensive power;
Examples too how quickly fades that flower.
See self-surviving they are idiots grown!
A melancholy proof our parts are not our own!

where he lived ; see him graze with the beasts, narrowly look upon him, and consider him, and take up the elegant parable of the prophet and say, "Is this the man that made the earth to tremble ; that did shake kingdoms ? How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning ! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations !" Isa. xiv. 16. Amidst such affecting scenes, let not our eyes be lofty, nor our hearts haughty. Let us remember that "we hold even reason itself, that ennobling quality, that boasted prerogative and distinguishing perfection of human nature, upon a very precarious tenure ; and, as one expresseth it, something with a human shape and voice hath often survived every thing human besides." Let us attend to that charge of God by Jeremiah ; "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, neither let the rich man glory in his riches," Jer. ix. 23. We may learn,

3. *How much are they to be pitied, who have lost their understanding !* After having considered the case of Nebuchadnezzar, let us think with compassion on others, who in this respect resemble him, that they are destitute of reason. This is the case of those who are naturally idiots, and never discovered any considerable degree of rational thought, or manly actions. It is the case of those, who by violent disorders of body are become delirious, or so overwhelmed with melancholy, that they think and judge wrong of themselves, and take every thing by the worst handle. This is the case of many in the decline of life. Their faculties decay ; they outlive even themselves, and become children a second time. The case of any of these persons is grievous and pitiable ; especially the case of those who are become delirious. To lose the understanding is undoubtedly the worst, the sorest of all temporal judgments ; it is much worse than death itself. They who are in this condition deserve our tenderest pity, from whatever causes their disorders proceed. Let us endeavour to enter into their cases, and be pitiful towards them. To make sport with such unhappy persons, to turn their ravings into a jest, to take pleasure in imitating their irrational actions, is extremely indecent, cruel, and irreligious. If any of our relatives or friends should ever fall into such unhappy circumstances, the most compassionate and tender care ought to be taken of them. No severe or harsh treatment ought ever to be used, except it be absolutely necessary to preserve their lives and restore their health. And as human methods of recovery in such cases often fail, we should pray earnestly that God would preserve them from "doing themselves any harm ;" restore them to themselves, and remove the disorder of their minds : that he would dart some beams of light and peace into their souls, and make their hearts better by a temporary distraction. I need say nothing to recommend this compassionate regard towards them, to any

whose hearts are generous, friendly, and humane. It will be sufficient to say, that no one certainly knows but that this may be his own case, and that our Lord Jesus Christ showed great tenderness and compassion to such unhappy creatures, and exerted his divine power to restore them to the possession of themselves, and to a right mind.

4. *How thankful should we be for the continued exercise of our reason.* "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understanding." It is God's constant visitation that preserveth that spirit, and continueth the exercise of our faculties. Whoever seriously considers the intimate connexion between the soul and body, and how easily and frequently the faculties of the mind are affected by the disorders and injuries of the body, will see constant cause to magnify the goodness of God, that there are not more persons deprived of their understanding; or who have it weakened to such a degree, as to render them useless and burthensome to others. It is really astonishing, that there are not more idiots and mad people, considering how tender and delicate the texture of the brain is, which is the seat of the soul and its sensations: considering how many accidents children are liable to, even under the care of the fondest mothers, much more while in the hands of mercenary nurses, from whom tenderness for other persons' children can never be expected, after they have put off all tenderness for their own. Considering the many falls and blows which these little creatures meet with, and how easily a very slight one may disorder the brain and weaken the understanding, it can be imputed to nothing but the extraordinary care of Providence that the senses and understandings of so many children are preserved. A consideration which should lead parents to great and daily thankfulness! Persons who have been recovered from violent fevers, which had confounded all their ideas, and made them delirious and raging, should never forget the goodness of God in restoring them to health and soundness again; and their relations and friends, upon every recollection of such a mercy, should renew their thankful acknowledgments. In a word, there are few of us but have passed through such violent disorders, such lingering sickness, or met with such falls and bruises, as might very easily have disturbed or destroyed our reason; so that we ought gratefully to own the good hand of our God upon us, that we are yet capable of filling up a place among reasonable beings; discharging the duties of life, enjoying the blessings of friendship and society, and tasting the comforts and pleasures of religion. The aged, who begin to feel their understanding and memory decay, should be very thankful that these are not quite lost, that they are not entirely useless, a burden to themselves and to all their friends. With whatever afflictions God is pleased to visit any of us, while he

continues the exercise of reason, we ought not only to be submissive but thankful. If our understandings remain, and our spirits are not wounded, we have ten thousand times more reason for thankfulness than complaint.*

5. *How careful should we be to preserve our reason, to improve it, and employ it to the best purposes!* Understanding and knowledge is the highest natural perfection. Reason is the distinguishing glory of men above the brutes; and we should carefully avoid every thing that tends to destroy or impair it. In this view I must solemnly warn you against gluttony and drunkenness. Every excess hurts the soul. Men who are given to strong drink impair their understandings and stupify their faculties, as well as bring a temporary madness upon themselves. It was Nebuchadnezzar's punishment to have "a beast's heart given to him:" it is a pity that any rational creatures should make beasts of themselves. In this view I must caution you against any violent transports of passion, for these destroy the delicate traces of the brain, disturb the faculties of the soul, and often produce a settled melancholy, or a lasting frenzy. Too eager a pursuit of the world, and too strong an affection for any creature, weaken the animal powers, corrode the mind as well as the body, and provoke God to take away the heart. There is nothing which is a greater enemy to the understanding than idleness. The faculties of many rust away for want of use or employment. They doze away their senses and become stupid and unprofitable. Finally, let us be careful to improve our understandings continually, by reading and reflection, by conversing with the wise and good, and especially by meditation on divine things, and daily fervent prayer to the Father of lights and wisdom. Let us employ our faculties in a manner becoming *rational* creatures. Reason was given us that we might know God and ourselves; that we might contemplate his works and consider his doings; that we might know and practise the duties of our connexions and relations in life, and especially study the glorious gospel, which is able to make us "wise unto salvation." Let us remember that we never use our reason to the best purposes till we become truly religious. "A man that understandeth not," saith the Psalmist, "is like the beasts that perish," Ps. xlix. 20. If we employ our rational powers only to get money, to make provision for the flesh, to laugh and jest, to adorn the body, to dance and game, and the like, we might as well have been brutes or idiots; yea, we had better have been such, for then we should

* A worthy pious minister in London, whose temper was naturally gloomy and fretful, when he found these dispositions prevalent and growing upon him, used to visit Bedlam and walk round its cells; that seeing so many of the most miserable objects, he might be excited to a resolute guard upon himself, and habitual thankfulness to God for his various mercies, especially the continuance of his reason and capacity for usefulness.

have had no future awful account to give of perverted and abused faculties, nor have been capable of cutting reflections and everlasting torment. "Be ye not then as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding," but "consider and show yourselves men." You become men, indeed, when you become good. You may live like brutes, but you cannot die like them. There is a future world to which your immortal spirits must remove, in order to receive their doom, and be fixed in an unalterable state. "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise;" and "glorify God with your spirits, which are his." I conclude with those instructive words of the Psalmist, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever," Ps. cxi. 10.

DISCOURSE XXIX.

THE FATHERLESS FINDING MERCY IN GOD.

HOSEA XIV. 3.

For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

THOSE cases and circumstances in human life which are often mentioned in scripture, and which the great God is represented as particularly regarding, deserve *our* serious consideration. There are few cases which more sensibly touch the minds of humane and considerate persons, and draw forth their compassion, than that of fatherless children, especially orphans, that is, persons deprived of both their parents. The condition of a single orphan is pitiable, much more that of a number of them in a family. But it is very observable, that there is hardly any afflictive case more compassionately considered and espoused, and for which relief is more abundantly provided in the word of God than theirs; and it shall be the business of my present discourse to show this, which I hope will afford consolation and instruction to such persons, and give me occasion to suggest some reflections which may be of general use. In the beginning of this chapter the Israelites are represented as returning to God by repentance and resolutions of amendment. They are directed to implore pardoning mercy, and to express before God their resolution, that they would no more trust to the Assyrians, nor multiply horses for war, which God had forbidden, nor any more worship idols. And then they urge in the text an encouraging plea, that God would be favourable to them, "for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Let us consider,

- I. The distressed case here supposed ;
- II. God's kind regard to it ; and then draw some instruction from these particulars. Let us consider,

I. *The distressed case here supposed.*

The word "fatherless" is sometimes used in scripture in its natural, common sense ; and sometimes it is used figuratively, to denote afflicted and destitute persons in general. It sometimes means children who have actually lost their father. So it is said by the Psalmist, "Let his children be fatherless," Ps. cix. 9 ; and there are many such places that I may hereafter mention. But the word often signifies an orphan ; a child that is both fatherless and motherless, and figuratively means persons in very afflicted and helpless circumstances. Thus it is used concerning the whole Jewish nation, after the captivity ; "We are orphans and fatherless," Lam. v. 3. Our king, the father of our country, is taken from us ; God our Father hath forsaken us ; and our enemies rule over us and afflict us. Thus Christ saith to his disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless," John xiv. 18 ; the original is "orphans ;" in an afflicted state, without friends and comforters. Our text is a plea with God for pity, because he is kind to those who are properly fatherless. So that it is as if they had said, "We are in deep distress ; helpless and friendless ; and thou, who showest mercy to those that are really fatherless, wilt not be unmindful, we hope, of a nation now in very afflictive circumstances. We have been disappointed of assistance from those on whom we depended, and we have no other friend and helper to apply to." Our text supposeth that the case of orphans is truly pitiable ; and that, above all others, they stand in need of assistance and mercy from God. This representation of the unhappy case of orphans is certainly just, and I need not say much to show it. Such is the nearness and tenderness of the parental relation ; so great the obligation of children to their parents, and their dependence upon them, that to be deprived of them is very painful to a feeling heart. And it is a great, and generally an irreparable loss to children, to be bereaved of them, when they themselves are young. The support of a family often sinks with its heads, and their offspring are incapable of contriving or acting for their own sustenance. They are sometimes left entirely destitute ; often in straits, and thrown on the kindness of the world. Or if they are left in plentiful circumstances, it is frequently so much the worse for them ; as they are in danger of being cheated by cruel and mercenary men, or corrupted and ruined by the enticements of sinners. They are sometimes placed under oppressive or unkind masters and mistresses ; and have no wise and tender friend, to whom they can go, to pour out their complaint, and ease their minds ; and from whom they may receive redress or encouragement. They are ex-

posed to many injuries, hardships, and temptations, and want their parents' tender care; which is of itself a great thing, though they could do little else for their relief. They need the hand of wisdom, experience, and affection, to guide their giddy and unexperienced youth. Few are kind and compassionate enough to assist and direct them, especially if it requires any expense or labour. And even the advice of the most faithful friends doth not come with that force upon their minds, as the advice of a parent, proceeding from affection, and backed with authority. Hence they are exposed to the snares of evil company, and the wicked contrivances of those that lie in wait to deceive. The loss of the instructions, prayers, and examples of pious parents, and the discipline of a sober, religious family, is the most grievous circumstance in the case of orphans. For parental commands and restraints are generally the last things which wicked children disregard. Thus are orphans in danger of being ruined for both worlds. And good parents are so sensible of this, that nothing gives them greater concern in their dying moments, than the thought of leaving their children destitute and friendless. But, blessed be God, there is an ample and noble support in this distressing circumstance; for we have in the text,

II. *God's kind regard to them.*

In him "the fatherless findeth mercy." Though they do not find mercy in any other, they shall in him. Here is solid comfort for those who so much need it; yea, for every one of them, for each of them; as the word is singular, each fatherless person. For the illustration of this I would observe, that God hath commanded others not to injure, but to assist them; he hath expressly declared himself their friend; and he hath often in the course of providence shown himself to be so.

1. He hath commanded others not to injure, but to assist them. And this shows his concern for them. He made provision in the law of Moses that they should not be wronged. It is there commanded, that the judgment of the fatherless should not be perverted. He charged the governors of Israel, to "defend the fatherless," to judge them and plead for them. He commanded the king of Judah and his servants, to "do no wrong to the fatherless;" not only not to take advantage of their unhappy circumstances to plunder and injure them, but to support and protect them. Among the solemn curses to be pronounced upon mount Ebal, to which all the people were to say Amen, this is found; "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the fatherless," Deut. xxvii. 19. The observance of these commands is enforced by awful threatenings. For instance, "Ye shall not afflict any fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all to me," though in ever such a

childish, broken and feeble manner, "I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot," Exod. xxii. 22. "Woe to them that decree unrighteous decrees to rob the fatherless!" Yea, God threatens to bring destruction upon those that even "vex the fatherless." I will only refer you further to the prophet Malachi; "I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the fatherless." There are many commands in the law, that they should be assisted and supplied; especially that the "gleanings of the fields, olive-yards, and vineyards, should be left for the fatherless." I mention these passages so particularly, to show the concern which God hath for orphans. Now we may justly infer from them, that when he hath required such regard to be shown to them by others, he will himself take them under his protection and care. But this leads me to observe,

2. He hath expressly declared himself their friend and guardian. When I set myself to consider this point, and to examine what the scripture saith upon it, I own I was much impressed and affected to find, in how many strong and delightful phrases the Lord expresth his concern for them. So that I think I may say, that there is no one afflictive case, concerning which more is said in scripture. And let me entreat your attention to these particulars. He is styled their reliever, helper, judge, redeemer, and father. He is their reliever. So David saith, "He relieveth the widow and fatherless," Ps. cxlvi. 9; which may signify, supplying their wants, raising them up friends, directing them in their difficulties, and comforting their hearts. He is their helper; "The poor committeth himself to thee, thou art the helper of the fatherless," Ps. x. 14. He protects them from the dangers to which they are exposed, and is their refuge, when human help faileth. He is likewise their judge; "Lord, thou wilt judge the fatherless and the oppressed;" "He doth execute *the judgment* of the fatherless;" espouseth their cause against those who would artfully wrong them. He will clear up their innocence when it is aspersed, and recompense the losses they may sustain. Again, he is their redeemer; "Enter not into the fields of the fatherless," to plunder them or remove their land-marks; for their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee," Prov. xxiii. 10. He will defend their rights, avenge their wrongs, and either restrain or punish their oppressors. But the most comprehensive and delightful idea of all, is that which is given us by the Psalmist, "A father of the fatherless is God in his holy habitation," Ps. lxxviii. 5. He is the father of all men: but he is theirs in a peculiar sense; to provide, protect, counsel, and guide; in short, to do every thing in effect for them, which their earthly parents could have done, and infinitely more. It is really pleasing, and indeed wonderful, to observe, in what a variety of gracious language God speaketh concerning them; intimating at once thereby, how pitiable

their case is, how much they need his help, and how ready he is to grant it, according to the utmost extent of their wants and desires. To all these I add,

3. He hath in the course of his providence often shown mercy to them. Thus he hath illustrated and confirmed these declarations of his word. Many wonderful scenes of this kind God hath opened upon the world, which the wise observers of providence have seen and adored. We have known instances of families deprived of their heads. Every one lamented their removal, and many tender hearts shed a pitying tear over their descendants, fearing that they would be reduced to poverty, or never comfortably disposed of in the world. But Providence hath taken care of them, and raised them up friends, whose tenderness hath almost equalled that of their parents. God hath directed them to suitable and desirable employments and relations in life. He hath provided them unexpected supplies to settle them in the world. We have known instances of whole families, and large ones too, for whom God hath thus appeared, who are now filling up honourable and useful stations, and supporting and adorning religion. There have been many orphans who, through the favour of Providence, have appeared in the most respectable characters in life, and been eminent for piety, zeal, and charity. Yea, some of the most learned, holy, active, and useful ministers that I have ever known, have been those who were early left fatherless or orphans, and entirely, or in a great measure, supported and educated by the kindness of their friends.* Many of God's aged servants can say with David, "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." I need not go far for evidences of this truth. Many of you, my brethren, are evidences of it, and will readily and thankfully set to your seals, that "in God the fatherless findeth mercy." Thus doth the kindness of God to the fatherless appear, that he hath commanded others not to injure but assist them, on pain of his displeasure; he hath in his word frequently and most tenderly represented himself as their friend, patron, and helper; and he hath often, in the course of his providence, confirmed these declarations of his word. Let us now attend to the instructions which these particulars afford.

APPLICATION.

1. *How amiable a view doth this give us of the blessed God, and of his wonderful condescension.* There is not a more amiable character among mortals, than that of the man who sheweth mercy to the fatherless. When persons, no way connected with them, enter tenderly into their concerns, assist them with their

* Particularly Dr. Doddridge.

advice, money, and interest, and endeavour to make the loss of their parents as little felt as may be; what a signal act of kindness; what a lovely character is this. All admire it, even those that will not imitate it. The character of Job was most honourable; for wealth, dignity, power, influence, and piety, he exceeded all the men of the east, and indeed, the Lord himself said, there was "none like him upon the earth." Now this was one of his excellencies; "I delivered the fatherless, when there was none to help him, and caused the widow's heart to sing for joy;" "I have not eaten my morsel alone, but the fatherless hath eaten thereof, and from my youth he was brought up with me as with a father," Job xxix. 12, 13; xxxi. 17. If such a temper and conduct among men, especially in a great man, is so amiable, how amiable must the character of the great and glorious God be, who is "the father of the fatherless." He teacheth us to argue his goodness and pity from our own feelings, and by so many declarations of his word, testifieth his regard to orphans, and confirmeth them by so many appearances of his providence. Let our souls adore "the Lord, merciful and gracious, who is full of compassion and of great kindness." Let those particularly adore him, who, having been cast upon his providence from their infancy or childhood, have been "fed by him all their lives long to this day and redeemed from evil;" and especially if he hath taught them from their youth up, and sanctified them by his grace, "let them declare his wonderful works with thanksgiving."

2. *Let us imitate God in showing mercy to the fatherless.* He relieveth them; he is their helper, judge, redeemer, and father. Let us in this respect "be followers of God as his children," and be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful. I hope I need not warn any of you against oppressing and wronging them. The heart which is impious, hard, and cruel enough to do this, will not be affected by any warnings from me. Nothing but the vengeance of the Almighty and the flames of hell will be likely to remove its insensibility. But I exhort and entreat you to show them kindness, and let them find mercy with you. They are no doubt just objects of it, especially those who have lost pious, watchful, and affectionate parents. Your kindness will be particularly acceptable to them, and God will abundantly reward it. Let me exhort you to take their part, to plead their cause, to treat them with all the tenderness you can, not waiting for solicitation, which in their case it would be peculiarly grievous to make; but offering them your service, giving them wherewith to supply their wants, and help them forward in the world. In short, do for them what you believe their parents would have done, as far as it is in your power. Let me address to you especially, who have children of your own, and feel the workings of parental affection. I exhort you to pity and relieve

the destitute offspring of others. If you have orphans in your families, as apprentices or servants, show them particular tenderness, and if they have any gratitude, they will amply repay you. "If ye in any wise afflict a fatherless child, saith the Lord, your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless," Exod xxii. 24. Do not excuse yourselves from acts of kindness to them by pleading, that you have children of your own. "Have faith in God," Mark xi. 22, and his promises. By kindness to orphans you will be laying up portions for your own children. Let us all show our regard to the fatherless, by pitying and praying for them, directing and encouraging them, and, as far as we have ability, supplying their wants. That regard, which God our common father sheweth to them, recommends this in the strongest manner. In short, all pretences to religion are vain, while this duty is neglected. For thus saith the apostle, "Pure religion and undefiled before God, even the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," James i. 27; the word "visit" signifies to oversee them and take care of them. This is pure and undefiled religion, and with this God is well pleased.

3. *Let parents take encouragement to commit their children to the care of God.* All prudent parents are greatly concerned for the welfare of their children. It is evidently your duty, parents, to provide for your children; both for their present and future support. To be ambitious and eager to leave them very rich, is a great sin, and will very probably ruin your souls and theirs too. It is, as the prophet expresseth it, "coveting an evil covetousness against your own houses," Hab. ii. 9. But to be able to raise them above the inconveniences and temptations of poverty, and enable them to appear with respect in the world, is a laudable desire. To this end you ought to be diligent, prudent, and frugal. But the stations and circumstances of many are such, that they can hardly do more for their families than support them. Some of you can leave your children but little. Your care and industry are all that they have to subsist upon. The occupation of some is of such a nature, that a widow cannot carry it on. Should God remove you while your children are young and unsettled, they may be in straits, at least exposed to many difficulties. And you have no friends, whom you can depend upon to be their guardians. I wonder not that parents, yea even those who are truly pious, have some painful thoughts upon this head; especially when they are sick and languishing, and think it probable they may soon leave their dear children fatherless or orphans. It is your wisdom and duty to behave in such a manner, that you may be esteemed and beloved in the world; and that your children may find those, who will be friends and benefactors to them for your sakes. Great caution and great faith are necessary, that your care for them be not anxious, and

your concern about them be not distressing. Let it be your leading desire, concern, and care, to train them up for God ; to form them to the government of their passions and obedience to you. Endeavour to promote and cultivate in them an humble, obliging disposition, and a grateful sense and acknowledgment of any kindness which is shown them. Especially labour to form them to a religious temper, and a relish for spiritual and divine pleasures. And, as to all your cares about them, "cast them upon God." Lay up a stock of prayers, if you can lay up nothing else, for your children. Cheerfully commit them to your heavenly Father, "in whom the fatherless findeth mercy." He hath engaged to be their guardian. They are the children of his covenant ; and he hath promised to be a "God to you and your seed after you." He can do infinitely more and better for them than you could ever do. And his "righteousness and faithfulness extend unto children's children," Ps. ciii. 17. Remember, your anxiety and despondency will do them no good ; it will do yourselves much harm, and will displease God. Encourage yourselves, your wives and children, with that gracious declaration, "Leave thy fatherless children ; I will preserve them alive ; and let thy widows trust in me," Jer. xlix. 11. Those of you who have been left fatherless, and yet supported and helped by divine providence, will be ungrateful and inexcusable indeed, if you do not cheerfully leave your children to God. Once more,

4. *Let the fatherless and orphans seek mercy from God, and humbly commit themselves to him.* There are no persons whose afflicted case I more tenderly pity, and whom I could be more glad to assist and relieve. What can I do better for you, who are in such circumstances, than to remind you of, and commend you to, that infinitely powerful, wise, and good Being, "in whom the fatherless findeth mercy?" This mercy you may obtain, if you will earnestly seek it. Let me therefore address you, in the gracious language of God himself ; "Wilt thou not from this time," this time of peculiar difficulty and distress, "cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?" Jer. iii. 4. He was your father's God ; and he will not disown the relation to you, if you thus cry to him. Go to his throne then by prayer, and plead the promise in the text. You are sometimes saying in the bitterness of your souls, "I have lost the best of fathers," or "the best of mothers ;" perhaps both. But is it no comfort that you have, or may have, the best of beings for your Father still ? Providence is not, as one expresseth it, "enclosed in your parents' tomb." God is the dwelling place of his people in all generations. Without him your parents could have done nothing for you. If he taketh you under his care, you will want for nothing that is truly good for you. But then it must be your most diligent, solicitous endeavour to behave as his children ; else you will sustain the greatest loss which a human creature

can possibly sustain ; lose a good Parent, and a good God too. "Be followers of God as his children." See that you honour and love him ; that you hear and read his word with attention and seriousness ; that you pray to him morning and evening, as your Father in heaven, through Christ Jesus, who is the way to the Father. Humility, diligence, contentment in your stations, and thankfulness for the kindness of your friends, will recommend you to the favour of the world, and entitle you to the blessing of heaven. But remember, that "if you forsake God, he will cast you off for ever ;" and your pious parents themselves, as well as they loved you, will hereafter disown you. Thus the rich man in hell, "saw Abraham afar off, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me ;" but Abraham disowned him, Luke xvi. 24. I shall conclude the discourse with those words of the Psalmist, which give direction and encouragement to the fatherless and orphans, to parents and children, yea to all the people of God ; "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart ; wait, I say, on the Lord," Ps. xxvii. 10, &c.

DISCOURSE XXX.

ABRAHAM'S SUSPICION OF ABIMELECH'S PIETY.

GENESIS xx. 11.

And Abraham said, Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place ; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.

WHEN the Psalmist was devoutly recollecting and celebrating God's wondrous works and providential appearances for the patriarchs, he observed, that "when they went from one nation to another, and from one kingdom to another people, he suffered no man to do them wrong ; yea he reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not my anointed, and do my prophets no harm," Ps. cv. 14. We have a remarkable instance of this, in the chapter where our text is. It is part of the history of Abraham, the father of God's ancient people. He came to Gerar, a city of the Philistines, south of Canaan. There, as he had done before in the land of Egypt, he said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister ;" lest, being a beautiful woman, she should be taken from him, and he be destroyed or injured on her account. It was true in some sense that she was his sister ; some suppose that she was really his sister ; others, more probably, that she was his half-niece, daughter of Haran, his half-brother ; so near a female relation being commonly called a sister among the Hebrews. But he concealed part of the truth, namely, that she

was also his wife. This he thought he might lawfully do, as it was the probable means of saving his life. But as this manner of speaking carried a plain intimation that she was not his wife, it was deceiving the Philistines, as well as distrusting God. Abimelech, king of Gerar, took Sarah, intending to make her his wife. God informed him in a dream, that she was another man's wife. He pleads his ignorance of this. The Lord accepted the plea, and commanded him to restore Abraham his wife, because he was a prophet. This Abimelech did; but he expostulates with Abraham for deceiving them, and exposing him to the displeasure of God, and the whole nation to his plague (v. 9), "What hast thou done unto us? And in what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." Seeing Abraham confused with this expostulation, and unable to make a ready answer, he puts the question home to him in the next verse, "What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?" What impurity or indecency hast thou perceived in me or in my people, that led thee to take such a step? These Philistines looked upon adultery with great horror. Abimelech would never have taken Sarah, if he had known she had been another man's wife. Therefore he highly resented the imposition. Our text is Abraham's reply, and excuse for his weak and unbecoming behaviour, "And Abraham said, Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake." A poor excuse indeed! but the best he could make. However, in the connexion in which it stands, it suggests to us two remarks; which, if they engage our attention and influence our practice, will be of the greatest service to us in future life.

I. The fear of God is the most effectual restraint from sin.

II. Persons may have more of the fear of God in them than others are ready sometimes to imagine. I will consider each of these remarks, and endeavour, by divine assistance, to persuade you to fear God and honour all men.

I. *The fear of God is the most effectual restraint from sin.* Abraham imagined that the fear of God was not among the Philistines. He therefore concluded that they were capable of any mischief, and would stick at nothing to compass their impure and wicked designs. The fear of God frequently signifies in scripture, the whole of religion. But in the text and many other places, it seems to denote that part of it which immediately relates to God; and as this is most excellent and important in itself, and the foundation of the other branches of religion, it is often put for the whole. Hence it is called, "the beginning of wisdom." It signifies a constant, serious regard to God, as the governor of the whole world; which so influences the mind, as

to excite in it an habitual concern, not to do any thing offensive or displeasing to him, and a solicitous care to please him in all things. This disposition is founded on right notions of God ; as a being of perfect holiness ; who loveth righteousness and beholdeth the upright with approbation ; but must abhor and punish the wicked. It is founded on a persuasion of his universal presence, and perfect knowledge of all his creatures ; of all their actions, thoughts, and designs. The man who feareth God, not only believes in general that he searcheth and seeth him ; but he sets the Lord always before him, as the object of his constant regard ; and his heart is filled with an humble reverence and a filial awe of him. But let it be observed, that this is not a sudden passion, excited now and then by some awful representation of the terrors of the Lord, or affecting displays of his power and justice ; but it is a settled temper ; a prevailing, governing disposition in the heart. It is a temper nearly resembling that of a dutiful child to a wise and affectionate father. From a reverence of God's authority, a fear of displeasing one to whom he is so highly obliged, on whom he constantly depends, and who hath it in his power to punish every act of contempt and disobedience, he endeavours to know and to obey his will. But a sense of God's paternal goodness, and a hope in his favour, prevent this fear from becoming servile and painful, and make it quite easy and agreeable to the mind. This is a brief account of the nature of the fear of God. Where this principle doth not prevail, no good can be expected. The want of it introduceth all manner of confusion among intelligent creatures, renders them the very reverse of what they should be, and is indeed the chief cause of all the sins that are in the world. Thus David observes, "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes," Ps. xxxvi. 1. When I see their transgressions, I naturally conclude, that they fear not God. On the other hand, this principle is the most effectual preservative from sin ; indeed it is the only effectual one ; for it is suited to all ranks of men, and to all times and places.

1. It is suited to all ranks of men ; the highest as well as the lowest. Abraham thought Abimelech had not the fear of God, and therefore it was in vain to oppose his attempt to take away his wife. He hoped that perhaps his subjects might be restrained by his authority and power ; but what should restrain him ? As God is the supreme Lord and governor of the world, a being of almighty and irresistible power, the fear of him is sufficient to awe the greatest earthly potentate. Other principles may prevent inferior persons from doing injury to others ; but nothing short of this can effectually control the great and the mighty. A regard to men may prevent even these from becoming tyrants and oppressors ; but what shall make them sober and chaste,

serious and devout ? They are often above regarding the censures of men. Their courtiers and attendants in general will flatter and compliment them, whatever their behaviour be. But the fear of God will make even the greatest men pious as well as just, devout as well as sober and charitable. Many of the poor and mean despise the censures of others. They think, they cannot sink any lower ; and that their poverty is a security from affronts and injury. Therefore they often indulge in every vice which doth not immediately expose them to punishment or destroy their livelihood. But when the fear of God taketh possession of their hearts, they consider themselves as standing in his sight on a level with others ; equally the subjects of his moral government, and accountable to his impartial tribunal. Many of the rich and great are too idle, and the poor too busy, closely to consider the natural beauty of virtue and deformity of vice ; or to look forward to the remote consequences of their present behaviour. The fear of God, therefore, is the only principle, that can effectually restrain men of all ranks from practising that which is evil. Thus Joseph, who was prime minister of Egypt, and upon whom Pharaoh had devolved the whole power of government, not only abstained from punishing his brethren for the injury they had done him, but treated them with the greatest kindness ; and the reason he himself gives us, "I fear God," Gen. xlii. 18. Nehemiah likewise, who was governor of the land of Judea under the Persian prince, having mentioned in his history the oppression of the former governors and their unreasonable exactions, saith, "But so did not I, because of the fear of God," Neh. v. 15. Again, this principle is the best preservative from sin, as,

2. It is a disposition suited to all times and places. Other motives may operate upon mankind now and then ; but this always. And the reason is plain. They know that the object of their fear is always present with them ; discerns, observes, and remembers all their actions, words, and thoughts ; and that his judgment of them is always according to truth. Wherever men go, they are under the eye of the righteous and all-wise governor of the world ; the lover and rewarder of righteousness, and the enemy and punisher of sin. The fear of men may restrain from open iniquity and and notorious injuries to others. A regard to the good opinion of those about them may engage many to put on a fair outside. But a deep sense of God upon the heart will control its secret thoughts, subdue its sinful desires, and prevent its harbouring hatred, ill-will, purposes of revenge, or any inclinations which may be displeasing to him, "who understandeth our thoughts afar off," Ps. cxxxix. 2. Men that are not influenced by the fear of God, indulge such dispositions without control, till they ripen into action. By degrees those principles, that led them for a while to conceal their faults,

grow weak and ineffectual; then they throw off the mask and bid defiance to the censures of mankind. But the fear of God is a principle always strong and operative. It guards all the powers and faculties of the soul, and preserves it from being overcome by those temptations, which would quickly be too strong for every other principle. Hence Solomon observeth, "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil," Prov. xvi. 6. Thus the fear of God is the best preservative from sin, as it is adapted to influence all ranks and conditions of men, and to regulate their conduct at all times and every place. Before I proceed to the next head, let me make a brief APPLICATION of this. Let us cultivate this principle in ourselves, and endeavour to promote it in all about us.

1. *Let us cultivate this principle in our own hearts.* Sin is the greatest evil; it is an abuse of our rational faculties; it perverts the true end of human life; it is an affront to our Creator; it doth the greatest injury to our own souls, and depriveth us of substantial happiness and joy. Every one, therefore, who hath a due regard to his own peace and comfort, will be afraid of it and labour to avoid it. Now as the fear of God is the best preservative from it, this disposition should be carefully cherished. This is "the whole of man;" that in which his thoughts, desires, and pursuits should centre, as his whole happiness dependeth upon it. Let us therefore, according to Solomon's direction, "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long," Prov. xxiii. 17. In order to this, let us meditate on his excellency and glory, his majesty, and his power, and especially his omnipresence. Let us direct our views to him, as a God of perfect knowledge, who is acquainted with all the thoughts that come into our minds. Let us reflect on the instances in which his power and justice have been displayed in punishing those who were far from him, and destitute of his fear. But lest our fear should become servile and tormenting, let us delight to dwell on the contemplation of his goodness, and the numerous displays of it towards us. That, according to the instructive phrase of the prophet Hosea, we may "fear the Lord and his goodness," Hos. iii. 5, and never abuse what is so venerable, nor presume to offend so kind and merciful a being. Let us guard against every thing that would weaken this principle in our souls; such as the irreverent use of God's name; light expressions or thoughts of his day, his word and worship, or any thing bearing his superscription. Let us often think of the solemnity of the future judgment; the day when God will "distinguish between those that fear him and those that fear him not, and render to every man according to his work." That, "knowing the terror of the Lord, we may sanctify him in our hearts, and make him our fear and our dread; and then he will be to us for a sanctuary," Isa. viii. 13, to preserve us from every snare, and secure us from all evil.

2. *Let us endeavour also to promote this principle in all about us, especially in the rising generation: by giving them awful, and yet amiable ideas of God; and always speaking to him and of him with the utmost reverence and solemnity.* This, like every other principle, is best planted in youth. It will strengthen as reason doth. And as observation, and reflections upon the works and word of God, convey new and venerable ideas of him to the mind, they will all strengthen this principle; and so it will produce the most happy effects. If we desire that our servants and dependants should discharge their duty faithfully, and be blessings to us and our families, let us labour, after the example of David, to “teach them the fear of the Lord,” Ps. xxxiv. 11. And then, as it is intimated by the apostle, Col. iii. 22, they will serve us “not with eye-service,” just when our eye is upon them, “as men-pleasers, but in singleness (or uprightness) of heart, fearing God.”* Having recommended it to you, and urged upon you to cultivate and strengthen the fear of God in your own hearts, as the most important and excellent principle, and to take great pains to promote it in others, especially your children and servants, I proceed to observe from the text,

II. *Persons may have more of the fear of God in them than we are ready sometimes to imagine.*

Abraham suspected that the fear of God was not at Gerar; though for aught appears from the story, there was no reason for this suspicion. Abimelech himself seems to have been not only a very wise and judicious but a pious man, a worshipper of the true God, like Melchizedek: one with whom he conversed by dreams, as he used to do with holy men in those ages. God therefore warned him of his danger, and did not send plagues on him for taking Sarah, as he did upon the king of Egypt and his house in like circumstances, Gen. xii. 17. He expressed the utmost dread of adultery, and challenged Abraham to produce any particulars in his conduct, or the conduct of his subjects, which might dispose him thus to suspect, prevaricate, and deceive. But Abraham suspected without reason, and might think, that though the inhabitants of Gerar had some general notions of the true God, yet these were not sufficient to regulate their conduct and preserve them from sin. However, he had no reason for this jealousy of them. And supposing that the fear of God had not been in that place, it would not follow that they would murder an innocent person, merely to gratify their lusts. This was Abraham's infirmity, and it is an infirmity to which we are all liable, to entertain an injurious opinion of others; to judge uncharita-

* A pious tradesman wrote upon his goods their respective prices, according to the usual method of concealment, in one or more of the following ten letters, “FEAR THY GOD;” in order to remind himself, his children and apprentices of their duty.

bly of them, and to suspect that they fear not God, but are strangers to real religion, when perhaps they are greatly under its influence, and sincere in the profession which they make of it. To rectify this error, it may be of advantage to point out the chief causes of it, and to show the bad consequences of indulging a suspicious temper. Let us consider,

1. The causes of such a suspicion. One may be, a bad state of the blood, an ill habit of body, which disposeth the mind to be fretful and peevish. A person in this circumstance is accustomed to view himself and his own concerns in the worst light, and so is apt to form an injurious opinion of others. The juices are soured and full of acrimony; and by this the judgment of the mind is perverted, and men become ill-tempered and suspicious. It sometimes ariseth from ignorance of the nature of religion, or not sufficiently reflecting upon it: not considering that it is an inward principle, "the hidden man of the heart;" that the kingdom of God is, properly speaking, "within us," in the habits and dispositions of the soul. The degree and extent in which religious principles prevail and operate in the soul, are not discernible; and we are often incompetent judges of the motives upon which men act. When indeed there are open, notorious vices in their conduct, and when they neglect the means of religion, we may very reasonably conclude, that the fear of God is not in them. But when their general conversation is decent, orderly, and becoming the gospel, we ought to believe that they fear God, and that there is an inward religious principle which regulates and governs their actions. Besides, it is to be considered, that the best characters are not perfect. There are errors and blemishes in the most holy men. Our context is a proof that there were such in Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God. The prevailing disposition may be holy, where there are some instances of a conduct not so regular and honourable as it should be. And it is very unreasonable to condemn a man in general terms, and to deny that he fears God, because he hath some imperfections. This suspicion sometimes ariseth from not making due allowances for the different temper, education, and customs of mankind. The natural temper of some worthy persons, for instance, is brisk and lively; and they have such a constant flow of spirits, that it is not easy to restrain and govern them. This leads them into some levities, which men of graver tempers are apt to condemn as inconsistent with the gospel. On the other hand, these lively persons may, in their turn, censure the grave and the gloomy, as destitute of real religion, and substituting a sour aspect and a stern behaviour instead of it. The present rising generation is not educated, even by wise and pious parents, in that strictness with which they themselves were brought up by their parents. I speak not this to the praise of the present age. For though their fathers might

carry some things to an extreme, I think the extreme into which the most parents now run is much more dangerous.* Young people are now indulged by their parents in liberties in which they themselves were never indulged, and which their much wiser parents would have dreaded. But a general practice consecrates such things, and men are led away by the throng, without allowing themselves to think and examine. Yet as such indulgences, if they are not carried to excess, may perhaps be consistent with the fear of God, it would be unreasonable, on account of them only, to suspect the want of it. The different customs of different places and ages may occasion this unfavourable judgment. The appearances of strict religion are, in the present day, unfashionable, and many of those who do fear God are desirous to conceal it. They deprive religion of some credit, and themselves of great usefulness, because they would not be laughed at as precise, scrupulous, and puritanical. They are especially careful to avoid such expressions of their love to God, hope in him, and devotedness to him, as one would think should be natural and becoming in every good man. This they do, because they would not be charged with hypocrisy or be called enthusiasts: a name very often applied to the most rational and excellent Christians. Because religion is unfashionable, some good men carry their privacy in it to an extreme, and are ashamed of that which is their greatest glory. This ought to be considered as a reason why we should not be too suspicious of the character of others. Some may fear God, yet love retirement, and choose to live as it were out of the world. Others may be solicitous to conceal their piety, even to a fault; because their spirits are weak and fearful, and they live in a crooked and perverse generation.† But the chief source of a suspicious temper is uncharitableness, a want of brotherly love, a propensity to judge rashly, without reason and without ground, concerning the character of others. For instance, many judge of the character of others by their religious principles and forms of worship. They will not allow that such a one feareth God, because he holds such and such tenets, which the censurer apprehends to be unsound and erroneous: because he worships God in a different place or a different manner from himself. I presume Abraham might think that Abimelech and his people did not fear God, because they were not circumcised;

* See "An Address to Protestant Dissenters as such," in which there are some useful remarks on this subject.

† "I had but one fear or suspicion concerning Lord Chief Justice Hale, which since, I am assured was groundless; I was afraid, lest he had been too little for the practical part of religion, as to the working of the soul towards God in prayer, meditation, &c., because he seldom spoke to me of such subjects, nor of practical books and sermons, but was still speaking of philosophy and of spirits, &c. But at last I understood, that averseness to hypocrisy made him purposely conceal most of such his practical thoughts and works. Then I sent him a confession of my censures of him, and my joy to see the conviction of my error." Baxter's Additions to Burnet's Life of Hale, p. 127, ed. 1774.

had not the seal of God's covenant ; or did not offer sacrifices, or not such sacrifices as he did. For Abimelech challengeth him to produce any thing in their general conduct, which might justify his suspicion of them. "What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?" (v. 10.) So too many imagine, that others do not fear God, because they are not of their sentiments, party, or persuasion. They conclude, that there is no fear of God among heathens, Jews, Mahometans, or Papists. Nay, perhaps their ignorance and uncharitableness go further ; and they deny or suspect the virtue of all who are not in their narrow way of thinking about the tenets and forms which divide the protestant world. To this men are sometimes led by supposing that those who differ from them act upon all the consequences which seem to follow from their notions ; whereas, few, very few, do so. There are multitudes who hold principles which are in themselves very injurious to real piety and gospel-worship, and yet act directly contrary to them. Their hearts are better than their heads. And what our Lord foretold of his disciples in the literal sense, is true of these in the figurative, "If they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them," Mark xvi. 18. Hasty, inconsiderate men, who will not read and think, magnify the circumstantial of religion into the essentials ; and so speak evil of all that differ from them in rites and forms, and are not of their sentiments and party. Sometimes the circumstances of family and place create a suspicion. Certainly he cannot fear God, who descends from such wicked ancestors. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" John i. 46, was a suspicion entertained by honest Nathanael : and if he had not had moderation enough to go and see, he had missed of Christ, and perhaps never had the honour of being his disciple. Men's prejudices get the better of their reason ; and they condemn whole bodies of men in a lump for some supposed errors, or the real failings and iniquities of a few. But such methods of judging are very rash, and show much ignorance and a great want both of good temper, candour, and Christian love. These are the causes of a suspicious temper : the chief reasons why men are apt, with Abraham, to think, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place," or among this people. It sometimes proceedeth from the disorders of a man's own body ; more frequently from ignorance of the nature of religion ; or, not making due allowances for the different natural temper, education, and customs of mankind ; but principally, from a rash, censorious, uncharitable spirit. Let us consider,

2. The bad effects of this temper. Here I would observe that it is displeasing to God ; it is injurious to the persons suspected, to the cause of righteousness, and to ourselves.

It is displeasing to God. He commands us to "honour all men," as his image ; to be charitable and courteous. And he is displeased when we act contrary to any of his commands,

especially when we judge men's hearts, and censure or suspect their character without good foundation. This is usurping his prerogative to know and weigh the spirits of men. It is taking the work out of his hand to censure and condemn them. It really shows that we have not the fear of God in our own hearts; at least that our characters are very defective. Accordingly Solomon observeth, that "he who despiseth his neighbour sinneth;" "The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes," Prov. xiv. 21, xxi. 10. Whereas he who shall dwell with God, "taketh not up a reproach against his neighbour," Ps. xv. 3. "He," saith the apostle James, "that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law," James iv. 11. He affronteth the great Lawgiver and Judge, as if his laws were defective or his judgment partial. Further, it is injurious to the persons suspected. The fear of God is the greatest glory of a man. The saints are "the excellent of the earth." To charge men with the want of this principle is really the greatest affront that can be offered. So Abimelech thought. He therefore gave Abraham a sharp, but very just reproof for it. It is very unrighteous in itself, if the suspicion be not very well founded. It may tend, if the persons suspected be not established in religion, to discourage them, to prevent their progress in it, yea, to prejudice them against it. To which I would add, that an unreasonable judgment, or suspicion of the character of others, may too naturally lead us to think, that it is not sinful to deceive and injure them; and, at last, bring us to act upon that horrid tenet of the Romish church, that "no faith is to be kept with heretics." Again, it is injurious to the cause of virtue and righteousness. The honour and support of religion very much depend on the number who adhere to it, and the character and credit which they have in the world. And, therefore, by open censures to take away one of its friends, or to represent one, who at worst is neuter, as an enemy to it, is doing it a great injury. The cause of infidelity never triumphed so much among us as when some bigoted zealots took it into their heads to call Mr. Locke a deist, and Archbishop Tillotson an atheist; though they were two of the best friends, ablest advocates, and brightest ornaments, which Christianity ever had. It is a peculiar dishonour to the religion of Jesus, which so largely inculcates love, candour, and sweetness of temper, when its professors censure and despise others, whose general conversation is agreeable to its maxims. Nor can such censurers hope to do any good upon others, either to convince, reform, or edify them, though they should attempt it; when they appear to entertain so unfavourable an opinion of them, and furnish them with a very natural prejudice against themselves. A good judge of human nature used to observe, that

“the way to make a man honest is to suppose him so, and treat him as such.” Once more, this suspicion is injurious to ourselves, as it tends to sour the temper and destroy the benevolence and peace of our own minds. It is also the parent of many other crimes. Abraham’s bad opinion of the Philistines led him to deny his wife, to lie unto them, and dishonour his relation to Jehovah as his prophet. If we suspect others to be bad, we shall be ready to despise them in our heart; to withhold that respect and service which is their due, and which might naturally occasion a mutual return. It may prevent such friendships and correspondence with them as may unfold their virtues to our view, give us much satisfaction in finding them very different persons from what we apprehended, and may be the means of improving our own knowledge and piety. Above all, our own eternal interest will be injured by this suspicious, uncharitable temper. Our Lord insists upon this in several passages of his excellent sermon on the mount. “Whoso is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to him, Raca,” that is, impeach his capacity and understanding, and call him a fool, or an empty fellow, “shall be in danger of the council,” that is, a greater punishment than the former. But if he go so far as to impeach his virtue and revile him as an impious person, saying, “Thou fool,” that is, thou sorry, wicked fellow, as the word signifies, “he shall be in danger of hell-fire,” Matt. v. 22. Again he saith, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,” Matt. vii. 1, 2. So dangerous is it to suspect men’s characters, which naturally leads to censuring and reviling them. It is displeasing to God, the judge of the whole earth; it is injurious to the suspected persons, to the cause of righteousness and peace, and to our own characters and interest.

APPLICATION.

What remains, then, but that I exhort you to consider these things? Endeavour to remember the causes of this bad disposition, that you may guard against their influence; and reflect upon the fatal effects of it, that you may not censure and despise others without cause.

I am far from encouraging an unlimited confidence in mankind. Prudence and caution are necessary in all our transactions with men; to prevent our trusting too much to them before they have been well tried. There are many hypocrites in the world, and I think there is just ground to suspect them to be so, who are most ready to pronounce others heretical, unsound, and wicked. There are many who fear not God

though they regard men; and therefore it is our wisdom to "cease from man." Nevertheless, I think it is our duty to believe well of every man, till we see good reason for the contrary. And if we lay this down as a rule to ourselves, as we certainly ought, it will tend to prevent much slandering, censuring, and evil speaking. If any thing appear amiss in the conduct of others, instead of immediately pronouncing them bad men, we should carefully examine whether it will not bear a better construction than we at first imagined. Or, if not, whether they have not some, yea many, good qualities, which may entitle them to our friendly regard. It hath been an old observation, that "every thing hath two handles." It is capable of a good or bad interpretation. A man of wisdom, candour, and piety, will take every thing by the fairer handle. He will not judge of men's characters by a single action, much less if it relates to himself. He will be peculiarly cautious of judging and pronouncing concerning another's character and state, if he differs in opinion or worship from himself, or doth not come readily into any of his favourite schemes. What we cannot but in reason suppose to be well intended ought to be well taken. Let us watch against what St. Paul calls "evil surmisings," 1 Tim. vi. 4. And, as the same apostle exhorts, "not judge our brother, or set at nought our brother, since we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," Rom. xiv. 10. To conclude. Let us remember, that "love is the fulfilling of the law;" that without charity, though we have all knowledge, all faith, all zeal, we are nothing. Now of charity the apostle gives this amiable description, with which I conclude; "Charity suffereth long and is kind; is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil," that is, puts the best construction upon dubious actions and characters. It "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth; beareth all things, and believeth all things;" it is not only averse to blaze the faults of others, but is not apt to suspect their veracity and integrity. And it "hopeth all things;" where it plainly seeth that things are bad, it is ready to hope they may be mended, and is very unwilling to treat even the worst of mankind as utterly incorrigible, 1 Cor. xiii. 4, &c. Oh lovely grace! divine quality! May the Spirit of peace and love diffuse it more and more through all our souls! Amen.

DISCOURSE XXXI.

THE NATURE AND WICKEDNESS OF OPPRESSION.

ECCLES. IV. 1.

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun : and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter ; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter.

THERE is scarce any sin against which more is said in the word of God, or which is more reproachful to a man and to a Christian, or more mischievous to society, than oppression. Yet I fear it is a sin which more persons are guilty of, and more suffer by, than is generally known. I esteem it therefore my duty to warn you against it. As the love of the world naturally leads to it, you will bear with me while I endeavour to show its nature and evil. Solomon having, in the former chapter (v. 16), spoken of public oppression from corrupt judges and magistrates, as an instance of the vanity of power and authority, proceeds here to speak of private oppression, as one evidence of the vanity of the world. “So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun ; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter ; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter.” I shall,

I. Consider what oppression is, and mention some instances of it ;

II. Show you the great evil and wickedness of it ; and then conclude with some exhortations grounded upon the subject.

I. *I am to consider what oppression is, and lay before you the most striking instances in which men are guilty of it.*

Now it is, as the text intimates, taking advantage of a man's weakness and poverty to injure him in his substance ; as fraud is taking advantage of a man's ignorance or inattention ; and extortion, of his necessity, to hurt him. But there are many cases in which both fraud and extortion are oppressive. Oppression is dealing unjustly or unkindly by a person over whose time, goods, trade, or business the oppressor hath power. It is principally the vice of rich men and superiors, who have power over their workmen, servants, tenants, and other inferiors. But it is not confined to them. The poor often meet with very bad, if not the worst, treatment from those who in station and fortune are very little above them. I am not sufficiently acquainted with “the depths of Satan,” and the iniquitous mysteries of trade, to specify every instance of this sin. But I will mention those which are most notorious.

It is oppression, when men impose what terms they please

upon others in commerce and dealings, without regarding what is just and right; when they oblige others to sell their goods under their real value, because they are in necessity; or to give more for a commodity than it is worth, because they cannot do without it. Unjust weights and measures are a fraud; but they are likewise an oppression; for, in many instances, persons know that they are cheated; they complain of it, and, in the language of the text, weep over it; but can have no redress, because "on the side of the oppressors there is power." If they will not submit to the grievance, those unjust men will not buy of them again; and perhaps there is no other market at which these sufferers can dispose of their wares. Selling bad and damaged goods to persons who dare not refuse to take them, and yet must lose by them, or not sell them again for a reasonable profit, is another instance of this vice. If a person makes a relation, a neighbour, or dependent, pay dearer for what he buys than his other customers, because he is under particular obligations to buy of him, he is an oppressor. Taking exorbitant interest for money lent, or exchange of bills and cash, on account of men's necessities, is extortion and oppression. Where a person, or a combination of persons, engross the whole of any commodity which is to be sold, in order to make an excessive gain of it, or to injure other tradesmen in the same way of business, this is oppression. When those who enjoy wealth, or have a sufficiency, intrude upon other persons' trades, and endeavour to draw every thing valuable within their own circle, they are oppressors. When they combine to raise or sink the price of any commodity, merely for their own profit and to injure others; and especially when they will sell without profit to ruin other tradesmen of small capitals, and engross the business to themselves; and afterwards will raise the price proportionably, to make up their own loss; this is notoriously oppressive. Combinations of merchants and factors not to buy goods of those manufacturers who purchase their raw materials from others, who will sell them at a more reasonable price, or by a fairer measure or weight, are likewise oppressive. Persons are guilty of this sin, when they defer paying their workmen and creditors in due time, and put the advantage of the delay in their own pockets; for the time is part of the contract as well as the money; at least is implied in it. Hence they are hindered in their own trade, and obliged to borrow money, perhaps of some other oppressor, to pay their debts or support their families. To make workmen unnecessarily wait for materials to work upon, and thereby lose their time and gain; to pay them in goods and not in cash; in goods which they do not want, or cannot sell but at a loss; is grievous injustice, and too common in manufacturing towns and countries. To pay workmen less than the wages agreed for; less than what is customary, or what, on account of the

particular work, they have a right to expect; to oblige them to work at such rates as they cannot live by; especially in hard seasons and dear times, and to take advantage of their necessities to further self-enriching schemes; these are likewise instances of this vice. Where persons pay their workmen the usual wages for their proper work, but yet employ them in other labours and services, for which they do not pay them at all, or not as they would pay other persons for the same time and labour; when they require these further services from them, merely because they have power over them, and these depend upon their masters for a livelihood; this also is oppression and expressly threatened in the word of God. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong, that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work," Jer. xxii. 13. To oblige servants to work above their strength, or more than is agreeable to contract or custom; to allow them too little time for rest, and none for religion, especially on the Lord's day, is oppression and the worst sort of it. Again, to be rigorous in exacting debts or other rights to the very utmost farthing, where poverty, sickness, losses, dear seasons, or a large family, render men incapable of paying what they owe; to allow them no time to satisfy their creditors; or to strip them of their all; this is vilely and cruelly oppressive. Obliging persons, over whom men have power, to vote or act against their consciences; persecuting, reviling, or even bantering, men for their religious sentiments and worship, is dreadful oppression. In the black list of oppressors must likewise be ranged, parents, masters and mistresses of families and schools, who behave cruelly and severely to their children, servants, and scholars; and abuse the power, which God hath given them, so as to make them "serve with rigour, and make their lives bitter with hard bondage," Exod. i. 14. There is likewise great oppression in a haughty, insolent, overbearing way of speaking to inferiors, which is very grating and hurtful to any sensible mind. Accordingly we frequently meet with this expression in scripture, "Speaking oppression;" so that a man may oppress another with his tongue. There may be, and I believe are, many other instances of this vice; but as these are the most common, the mention of them may be sufficient to show the nature of it. I go on,

II. *To represent to you the great evil and wickedness of it.*

It is more necessary to do this, because some of these instances of oppression are customary and gainful; and therefore men are not aware, or not willing to believe, that they are sinful. Hence the prophet saith of Ephraim, "He is a merchant; the balances of deceit are in his hands; he loveth to oppress; yet, saith he, I am become rich; I have found me out substance; in all my

labours they shall find no iniquity in me that were sin," Hos. xii. 7; nothing by which I shall gain a bad character among my neighbours. The wickedness and danger of oppression will appear, if we consider, that it proceeds from, and shows, a very bad disposition of mind; it is a high ingratitude and affront to the righteous God; it is detestable cruelty to the oppressed; it is directly contrary to the design of the gospel; and will certainly sink oppressors into everlasting ruin.

1. It proceeds from a very bad disposition of mind. If we trace oppression to its sources, we shall find that they are various, and all base and criminal. The principal source of it is covetousness; an inordinate love of the world. See how these are joined by the prophet Jeremiah, "Thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for oppression, and for violence to do it," Jer. xxii. 17. When men will be rich, when their hearts are set on getting money, and they "mind earthly things," they will seldom scruple the means of enriching themselves; but pursue their end by right or wrong. They care not what injury they do to others, if they can but keep up a tolerable character in the world. In some persons the practice of this sin proceeds from pride; to show their authority over others, and to keep them in awe. Hence they treat their inferiors as if they were of a lower species, and not worthy of common justice. This shows a base, ignoble mind. "Pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. They are corrupt; they wickedly speak oppression; they speak loftily," Ps. lxxiii. 6—8. In some, it is owing to luxury and extravagance. They are dressed with the spoils of the poor; and their fine houses, equipages, and entertainments, are supported by the properties and comforts of others. It is sometimes owing to sloth; because, like drones in the hive, they will not work, they prey upon the labours of the industrious. It is very often owing to resentment, malice, and ill-nature. If others, over whom they have power, complain of their unjust treatment, they will oppress them still more. "He that maketh haste to be rich," saith Solomon, "hath an evil eye," upon the property of others, and cares not what mischief he doth to them, in order to gratify his own ambition or revenge. Now a practice which proceeds from such bad principles and dispositions as these, must be very base and abominable, and ought to be detested by every man.

2. Oppression is a high ingratitude and affront to the righteous God. It is ingratitude to him, because he giveth men all their wealth and power over others, and he doth this, not that they may oppress, but protect, relieve, and serve others, and be a blessing to them. It must therefore be horrid ingratitude to abuse and pervert these favours to their injury. But what renders it worse is, that he hath bestowed upon men spiritual blessings and Christian privileges, and therefore to oppress and

injure them must be proportionably wicked. Further, he hath placed men in different circumstances in life; "made both the rich and the poor." He hath allotted to men such conditions here, that they need one another's assistance. The rich want the labour of the poor, as the poor want the money of the rich; and God expects that they should help one another, and so contribute to the general happiness. To oppress the poor, then, is defeating the wise and kind design of God's providence. Accordingly Solomon observes, "He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker," who hath made him poor. Further, the law of God, our supreme Sovereign, expressly forbids every kind of oppression, and requires that we follow what is altogether just, honourable, and kind. There are many precepts of this sort; "Oppress not the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the stranger." "In buying and selling, thou shalt not oppress." "Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant." "Ye shall not oppress one another, but thou shalt fear thy God; for I am the Lord your God;" and the like. Consequently God must be highly offended, "when he looketh for justice and behold oppression, and for righteousness, but behold the cries" of the oppressed, Isa. v. 7. He declares this sin to be an abomination to him, and that he will punish it in the greatest men. "The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients and the princes of his people, because the spoil of the poor is in their houses. What mean ye, that ye beat my people to pieces and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts," Isa. iii. 14. It is likewise acting contrary to his pattern, for though "God is mighty, yet he despiseth not *any*." "In plenty of justice he will not afflict," Job xxxvi. 5, xxxvii. 23; or who could stand before him? Oppressors are the very reverse of the holy, just, and good God, and resemble the father of lies and deceit, who was a murderer from the beginning, and an oppressor of all over whom he hath power. God hath threatened, that he will "spoil the souls of those that spoil the oppressed; and the cries of them, who have been defrauded of their hire, enter into the ears of the Lord of hosts," and he will plead their cause.

3. It is detestable inhumanity and cruelty to the oppressed. "A righteous man," saith Solomon, "regardeth the life of his beast." What then must we think of those who are oppressive and cruel to their fellow men, but that they are utterly void of justice, goodness, and humanity, that they are monsters and not men? Persons expect at least justice one from another in all their dealings and connexions. It is grievous to every honest mind to see the great bonds of society broken, and the foundations of commerce subverted. It is cruel to oppress inferiors, because they know their oppressors have power over them, and power which they should use with justice and moderation. It is disappointing them of that profit of their labours which they

expected, and the expectation of which carried them cheerfully through their cares and fatigues. To be oppressed grieves them, costs them tears, as the text intimates. They lament that their hopes are defeated, that they cannot pay their debts, support their families, and live creditably in the world. Hence God commands, "Thou shalt give the labourer his hire in the evening, for he is poor and setteth his heart upon it," Deut. xxiv. 15. Oppression is so grievous, that, as Solomon observes, it sometimes "maketh a wise man mad." It is owing to the oppression and cruelty of merchants and tradesmen, that "men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out," Job xxiv. 12. It is cruelty likewise to oppress men, because it is tempting them to act unjustly, and to defraud others. Yea, it may prejudice them against religion. When they see those who profess godliness guilty of this sin, it may lead them to think, that all religion is a jest, and that they are not bound by its laws, when their superiors break them. "Woe be to the man by whom such an offence cometh;" for this is cruelty to the souls of men.

4. It is directly contrary to the design of the gospel; which is to promote righteousness, love, peace, and happiness upon earth, as well as to secure the eternal salvation of mankind. Christ commands his disciples to "love their neighbours as themselves;" to do to others whatsoever they could reasonably desire and expect that others should do to them. "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, teacheth us to live righteously, and to provide things honest in the sight of all men." With regard to the privileges and blessings of the gospel, no difference is made between the rich and the poor. It is designed to open the heart in kindness and love; to lead the professors of it to seek the good of others, and be ready even to lay down their lives for them. These great duties our blessed Lord hath recommended, and enforced by his own example; for he was holy, harmless, undefiled. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his hand or in his mouth. "He went about doing good," and employed his power to promote the health, comfort, and happiness of mankind. His gospel is a constitution of grace and mercy. And if men, who know and profess this excellent religion, can allow themselves to be unjust, oppressive, or even unkind, and under a cloak of zeal and devotion trample on common honesty, they have received the grace of God in vain: they dishonour the gospel; will be condemned by their profession of it, and of all sinners be most inexcusable and miserable, which leads me to add, once more,

5. It will sink men into everlasting ruin. God is a just and righteous being, and at the judgment-day "he will render to every one according to his works." The Lord seeth and remembereth all the oppression that is done under the sun, and

he will at length reckon with those who have done it. On "their side there is" now "power;" so that the oppressed cannot help themselves. But on God's side there is almighty power, to humble and punish the proudest oppressor. He putteth all the tears of the oppressed into his bottle, Ps. lvi. 8; he will be their friend and advocate, and execute vengeance on those who oppress them. Hear what his word expressly declareth on this subject; "For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord," Ps. xii. 5. "I will come near to you in judgment, and be a swift witness against those that oppress the widow, fatherless, and hireling, and turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord," Mal. iii. 5. Thou hast dealt by oppression with the stranger; thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbour by extortion. "Behold, I have smitten mine hands at thy dishonest gain," testified my abhorrence of it; "and can thine heart endure, or thine hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee?" Ezek. xxii. 14. But observe, these are not the declarations and threatenings of the law of Moses only. The gospel of grace and mercy as awfully threatens all these iniquitous practices. Accordingly St. Paul saith, "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong he hath done, for there is no respect of persons with God," Col. iii. 25. "Let no man go beyond, over-reach, or defraud his brother in any matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such," 1 Thess. iv. 6. And now I may appeal to you, as the apostle doth to the Christians at Corinth, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" 1 Cor. vi. 9. Can a Christian be a stranger to what is so plain? In short, oppression is inconsistent with all hopes of obtaining mercy at last, and those who practise it will be punished with everlasting destruction. These particulars sufficiently show the great wickedness of oppression. It proceeds from bad dispositions of heart; it is ingratitude and a high affront to the holy and good God; it is cruelty to the oppressed; contradicts and defeats the design of the gospel; and exposes those who are guilty of it to everlasting ruin. Now let me conclude the discourse with some application, grounded upon what hath been said.

APPLICATION.

1. *I shall address to oppressors*; to those whose consciences tell them, as in the sight of God, that they have been guilty of this sin in the instances above mentioned or any other. I exhort you, sirs, to hearken to the voice of conscience, as the voice of God; to submit to its reproofs; and to be humbled deeply before God for your injustice and cruelty to men. Whatever you may think of yourselves, you are certainly in a wretched and deplorable state; as God hath declared, that

"he shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shown no mercy." I exhort you immediately and heartily to repent of your oppressions ; to give glory to God by a penitent confession of them in his presence, and an earnest application to him for pardon, through the blood of the great Redeemer. You are likewise to make restitution to those whom you have oppressed ; or to their heirs ; or if you can find none, to the poor ; for so the law of God required, Numb. v. 6—8 ; and thus do what you can to repair the damage you have done. Be assured, there can be no true repentance, and consequently no salvation, without restitution. It is an inseparable fruit of true repentance ; and if you are ashamed to acknowledge your fault and make restitution, you are yet under the guilt of sin, and will be punished for the wrong you have done. "Trust not in oppression, become not vain in robbery," though you get rich by them ; for "riches profit not in the day of wrath." What will ever so many hundreds and thousands gained by oppression profit you, when your souls are lost, and you are banished to a place of torment ? What advantage will unjust gain be to your families ? It will be, in the language of the prophet Habakkuk, "consulting shame to your own house. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the roof shall answer it," Hab. ii. 10, 11, rather than your injustice shall go unexposed and unpunished. You may think this admonition doth not belong to you, because you are not notorious oppressors ; because you keep up a fair character among men, and are reckoned honest. Perhaps all that this will amount to is, that those whom you oppress, dare not complain of it ; that you know how to impose silence upon them ; and that none love you so well, as to tell you the truth of your case, and reprove you for your injustice. Be it sufficient that your own consciences and the word of God tell you, you are oppressors ; and let it be your immediate care to repent, restore, and reform, lest you fall into the hands of the living and almighty God.

2. *Let me address to the oppressed.* It may perhaps be the case of some of you, and I would endeavour to be your comforter. Acknowledge the justice of the Lord in what you suffer from the hand of men. Though they are unrighteous, he is righteous, for you have sinned ; and he may choose this method of afflicting you, to lead you to repentance, to exercise your virtues, and make your hearts better. Let me exhort you to guard against a spirit of malice and revenge. Remember that their oppressing you will be no excuse for injustice to them. That "it is no harm to bite the biter," is a very wicked maxim. It is better to suffer many wrongs, than to do one. Yea it is our duty to render good for evil. Never so much as wish ill to those who injuriously treat you. "Say not thou, I will recompense evil, but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee,"

Prov. xx. 22. Which leads me to add, commit your cause to God, and leave him to plead it. He hath, in many places of scripture, promised to "execute judgment for them that are oppressed." He can make up your losses, or provide for you some other way. If you keep in the path of duty, he will be your comforter, though you have no other. Never sacrifice a good conscience to the fear of man; but endeavour to be like the Lord Jesus Christ; "he was oppressed and afflicted, yet opened not his mouth," Isa. liii. 7; "when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously," 1 Pet. ii. 23. Finally,

3. *I would address to those who can appeal to a heart-searching God, that they are guiltless of this sin.* I would exhort you to guard against the love of money, which is the chief root of this evil. Solomon observeth, "He that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent," Prov. xxviii. 20. I insist upon this, because men do not become oppressors at once. The love of the world insensibly steals upon their minds, roots out every good principle, breaks through all the rules of justice, charity, and humanity; turns a fair character into a detestable one, and a man into a devil. Let it be your care, to "despise the gain of oppression," Isa. xxxiii. 15. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways," though he get rich by them, "for he is an abomination to the Lord," Prov. iii. 31. To prevent your becoming oppressors, go not to the utmost bounds of things lawful. Keep on the safe side. Be not only just, but honourable, generous, and charitable, and "abstain from the very appearance of evil." Let me exhort you, likewise, to be comforters of the oppressed. "Consider," with Solomon in the text, their oppressions. If you see men cheated and imposed upon, inform them of it; if oppressed by men of power, do what you can to redress them; and "fear not the fury of the oppressor;" for he is the vilest of men, and abhorred both by God and man. "Be not partakers of other men's sins," by practising them or conniving at them. If you cannot redress the injured, at least comfort them, and show charity to them, the more they are oppressed. To conclude; let us rejoice in the view of the great day of account. Solomon adviseth, "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, marvel not at the matter, for he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they," that is, than powerful oppressors, Eccl. v. 8. There is a day coming, which is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God," when all the oppressions that have been done under the sun shall be publicly exposed; and God shall render tribulation to them who have troubled and injured their brethren. Then, "with the righteous God will show himself righteous;" and "blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

DISCOURSE XXXII.

ST. JOHN'S PRAYER FOR THE HEALTH OF HIS PIOUS FRIEND
GAIUS.

3 JOHN 2.

*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be
in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*

A CONSIDERABLE part of the comfort and usefulness of our lives ariseth from epistolary correspondence with our relations and friends, who live at a distance from us. It deserves therefore to be acknowledged as an instance of the goodness of God, that we have in the New Testament several familiar letters, written by the apostles to their particular friends. For these not only contain important sentiments and advices, which being of universal concern, demand our attention, but they instruct us how to make our correspondence useful and edifying. Our text is part of one of these letters. It was written by an apostle, who styles himself "the elder," and who was well known among the Christians by that title. This is generally agreed to be St. John. He might be so called on account of his sacred office in the church, as an apostle, as well as his advanced years; for he was now, it is supposed, about ninety. It is directed to his "well-beloved Gaius." This was probably Gaius the Corinthian, whom St. Paul mentions in his Epistle to the Romans, and calls "his host, and that of the whole church," Rom. xvi. 23; thus celebrating his great hospitality; a virtue for which he is here also commended. "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church," (v. 5, 6). If it was the same Gaius, he must have been an old man when this letter was addressed to him. St. John had a particular esteem for Gaius, because he was a most excellent and useful person. And he sends him this letter to encourage him in that which was good: and prevent a person of his character and influence from being seduced by those artful attempts, which many were making to pervert the gospel of Christ. He begins his letter with expressing his good wishes and prayers for his friend, that he might "prosper and be in health, even as his soul prospered." This he wished "above all things," as our translation renders it. But one cannot suppose that St. John would look upon health and prosperity as the chief good; therefore some would render it, "above all persons;" as if he had said, Thou art the person for whose welfare I am most particularly concerned. Perhaps it is best to read it, as the words will bear, I wish that in, or as to, all things, that in every respect, thou mightest prosper. I wish thee every desirable branch of prosperity; especially health.

The following remarks, arising from the text, will fully illustrate it, and make way for a practical improvement. The prosperity of the soul is the chief and most valuable prosperity. A person may have a prosperous and healthful soul, yet want external prosperity. We may very properly wish and pray, that our friends may enjoy worldly prosperity, especially health. And it may be further observed, that it is happy for our friends, when we can wish them to be as prosperous and healthful as they are religious.

I. Prosperity of soul is the chief and most valuable prosperity.

This is the greatest blessing which a man can enjoy. St. John intimates this, when he maketh the prosperity of Gaius' soul the standard by which to adjust his wishes for his welfare in every other respect. This is also plainly expressed in the following verse; where the apostle saith, "I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth." And then he adds, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children walk in the truth;" that is, observe the directions and obey the commands of the gospel. I am glad to hear that they are healthful and prosperous; but I chiefly rejoice that they walk in the truth; because that sheweth that their souls are in a prosperous state; that all is well within: and this is my greatest joy. For the illustration of this we may observe, that there is such a thing as the prosperity of the soul: and it is the greatest blessing a man can enjoy.

There is such a thing as the prosperity of the soul. By men's apostasy from God, their souls, through their union to these vile bodies, are liable to many irregular passions and dispositions. They are become polluted and enfeebled, and there is no health in them. It is necessary therefore that they be sanctified by divine grace; that the heart be made clean, and a right spirit be renewed within us. Sin is the disease of the soul; and when the power of it is subdued, and the principles and habits of holiness implanted and cherished, by the divine and almighty physician, then the health of the soul is restored and it becomes prosperous. It is in some measure healthful and prosperous, when it is filled with useful knowledge; when it is able to discern those things that differ; and hath a clear understanding of the divine will, and the various motives by which obedience to it is enforced. "That the soul be without knowledge is not good." Ignorance is its disease and its ruin. But knowledge is only the foundation of religion. Health of soul chiefly consists in piety and righteousness; in an ardent love to God, a high delight in the exercises of devotion; in a sincere faith in Jesus Christ, and a regular and circumspect conversation, founded upon the principles, and conducted by the rules, of his gospel. This St. John expresseth in Gaius's case

by "walking in the truth." It supposeth a constant desire and care to please God; a sincere resolution to adhere to our duty, without being diverted from it by the customs of the world, the practices of the great, or any difficulties which may lie in our way. It includes a behaviour consistent with that gospel of which we make a profession; and also a growth and progress in religion; especially the steady, extensive exercise of that love, which the word of God so frequently recommends. Those who have healthful souls, will, like Gaius, be eminent for charity and hospitality. According to their ability, they will assist "the brethren and strangers" (v. 5), and especially those who are engaged in preaching the gospel. Whatever they do by acts of kindness and liberality, they will, like him, do it "faithfully," sincerely and "after a godly sort" (v. 6), with a view to please and glorify God. They will, by their purses, their prayers, and their exhortations to one another, be, as the apostle expresseth it, "fellow helpers to the truth" (v. 8). The souls of such persons prosper; and this kind of prosperity is the most valuable and desirable. For as a heathen philosopher well observeth, "the soul is the man; that which is seen is not the man." If the soul be sick and miserable, the man is so. All those arguments which prove the worth of the soul, and its superiority to the body, establish this point. The soul is a spiritual, immortal substance; formed for God and endless happiness. It is endowed with rational and glorious faculties, capable of everlasting improvement and felicity. The end of all God's dispensations to mankind is to promote the welfare of their souls. The Son of God came from heaven, and shed his precious blood to redeem them. The Spirit of God is sent to enlighten, sanctify, and comfort them. Christian ministers and ordinances are appointed to save them from ruin, and train them up for glory. This shows the dignity and worth of our souls, and how much more desirable and excellent their prosperity is, than any relating to the outward man. Unless these prosper, there can be no solid comfort in life; no well grounded peace and hope in death; and no happiness beyond the grave. He that loseth his soul loseth himself, loseth his all; and nothing can make up the loss. This therefore is the principal thing about which we are to be concerned, that our souls may prosper. Let us observe,

II. *A person may have a prosperous soul, and yet want external prosperity.*

He may have a healthful soul, and yet be in low circumstances; or have a weak, sickly body. This was the case with Gaius. He seems to have been a man of an infirm constitution; but not perhaps in low circumstances, because we read of his generosity and hospitality. We cannot indeed infer from thence that he was rich; for, generally speaking, the most wealthy are the least

charitable in proportion to their substance ; and persons in middling circumstances, and who have families to provide for, are often most generous. However, St. John might naturally wish the continuance of his substance, and that God would increase his ability to be serviceable to his fellow Christians, as he knew his heart was disposed to be so. The children and favourites of God have often a small share of this world's goods. Religion indeed hath a natural tendency to promote prosperity ; as it makes men diligent and prudent, and preserves them from extravagant living and expensive pleasures. But God often orders it otherwise, and keeps them in low circumstances, that he may keep them sensible of their dependence upon providence ; that he may teach them to live by faith and prayer, and may exercise and improve their humility and patience, contentment, and compassion to their fellow-sufferers. In this instance Solomon's observation is verified, that "there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." But many who have healthful souls have weak bodies. Their souls are ill lodged ; and the tabernacles, in which they dwell, do not appear to suit the dignity and worth of the inhabitants. This is sometimes owing to disorders conveyed to them from their parents. It is frequently owing to the ill-judged indulgence of their parents. "Many" (as Mr. Baxter observes, who was himself an instance of it) "struggle all their days with pain and sickness, through the folly of their mothers ; who breed them up delicately, and deny them nothing which they like and crave, how injurious soever to their health." Sometimes they are made to "possess the iniquities of their youth ;" particularly impurity, intemperance, idleness, or ungoverned passions. The consequence of irregularities, practised while their souls were unrenewed, stick by them as long as they live ; and though the sin be forgiven, the painful effects of it upon the body remain. In many cases the immediate hand of God is to be acknowledged in the weaknesses and languors of our frame. He exerciseth his servants with this painful discipline, to make their hearts better, to quicken their diligence and excite their sympathy and concern for the good of others. Timothy, though possessed of unfeigned faith, well acquainted with the holy scriptures, and eminent for every Christian virtue, had a weak stomach and frequent infirmities, 1 Tim. v. 23. Thus doth God chasten many whom he loveth ; and with this view, that they may be "partakers of his holiness," and that the health and prosperity of their souls may be confirmed and increased. Let us observe further :

III. *We may very properly wish and pray that our friends may enjoy temporal prosperity, especially health.*

"Beloved," saith the apostle, "I wish," or rather, "I pray, that in every respect thou mayest prosper and be in health."

The word rendered "prosper" signifies to go on well in one's way; to have a comfortable journey through life. It is used by the apostle Paul concerning travelling, and rendered "to have a prosperous journey," Rom. i. 10. Gaius was such an ornament and support to the Christian interest, that the apostle John wished that his worldly prosperity might be continued; and especially that his health might be established and his useful life prolonged. And such a wish and prayer argued a truly wise, friendly, and Christian spirit in the beloved apostle. The poet observes that

Reason's whole pleasure, all the joys of sense
Lie in three words, health, peace, and competence.

True peace can only flow from true religion, and be the effect of prosperity of soul; for "there is no peace to the wicked." It is desirable that the other blessings may be added, to complete the happiness of a good man. These are indeed the least part of the happiness of a rational being: but, as they are highly conducive to such felicity as earth can afford, they may properly be the object of our wishes and prayers for ourselves and our friends. By a competency, a person's mind is free from anxiety and distress; and he is able to relieve and do good to others. Much of the comfort of life depends upon health. Where that is enjoyed, we can discharge those active services which our several relations and connexions demand, and can enjoy the bounties of providence with relish and pleasure. If an instrument be out of tune, the most skilful hand can produce no harmony. If the body be disordered by pain and sickness, the soul cannot act by it with ease, freedom, and cheerfulness.

"Those that labour under a broken constitution," (as one very emphatically observes,) "feel a little pain at every moment: or a certain uneasiness, which is sometimes less tolerable than pain, hangs continually upon them; and they languish in expectation of dying, perhaps in severe tortures." Poverty and sickness are apt to depress the spirit, and to make the temper impatient and fretful. It needs great strength and prosperity of soul to behave well, amidst wearisome days and nights, and months of vanity. Therefore it is reasonable and proper, that we should pray to that God, who raised this curious frame, and hath all nature under his control, that we may prosper and be in health. And if we hope for his interposition, it should be our care to avoid every thing that would injure the health, and to take proper methods to restore and confirm it, when it is impaired. This is a duty we owe to ourselves and fellow-creatures; and to neglect it is sinful: it is in effect self-murder. It is also our duty to pray for the blessings of prosperity and health for our friends, if God knoweth that these will be good for them. It is reckoned a piece of common civility to inquire after their health, and to wish them well and happy. But religion teacheth us to turn

these wishes into prayers to the Fountain of all good: and there is reason to hope that such prayers will not be in vain. If they do not prevail to obtain the blessings we seek for them, they will at least increase our own most valuable prosperity; by cherishing in our hearts pious and benevolent dispositions, and promoting, in our whole behaviour to our friends, the genuine effects of unfeigned pity and brotherly love. We may further observe,

IV. *It is happy for our friends when we can wish them to be as prosperous and healthful as they are good.*

Gaius was very happy in a thriving state of soul. He was so improved and established a Christian, as to justify the wish in our text. St. John, who could not but hold flattery in the highest detestation, makes the good state of his soul (as I hinted above) a standard by which to adjust the degree in which he wished his temporal interest. He could desire no greater happiness for him relating to this world, than that the health of his body might be equal to that of his soul. There are many, for whom if such a prayer were offered, it would be a kind of curse. Were you to say, "I wish you as well in all respects as your souls are," it would be wishing them ill indeed. If men prospered no otherwise than as their souls prospered, the world would soon become a dreadful scene of pain, want, and misery. And some of the richest, and most healthy and lively, would soon appear the weakest, meanest, and most wretched of mankind. But we have touched upon these thoughts under a former particular. The text then instructs us that the prosperity of the soul is the most desirable and valuable prosperity. That a person may enjoy this, and yet want external prosperity. It is very proper and becoming to wish and pray for the temporal welfare of our friends. And their case is truly happy, for whom we can properly desire and pray, that they may be as prosperous and healthful as they are good and holy. Having thus illustrated the words, I proceed to the practical improvement. And in order to make the discourse of general use, I would address myself to four sorts of persons, which will comprehend all to whom I am speaking.

APPLICATION.

1. *To those who have no prosperity, neither temporal nor spiritual.* Many such there are in the world, who are poor, sick, and weak, and at the same time their souls are ignorant, vicious, and unsanctified. They have no temper to bear their afflictions, and no wisdom to improve them. Considered as rational, immortal beings, they have nothing valuable in hand, and nothing in hope. If there be any such among you, to whom I am addressing, you must allow me to say, that you are of all men most miserable. And it is strange and amazing, that your pains and infirmities, your disappointments and wants, do not lead you to think of your souls,

and be deeply concerned for their prosperity. God hath brought these troubles and burdens upon you, that you may "consider your ways;" that you may turn to him and seek your happiness in him. He chastens you with pain and pining sickness, that he may dispose you to receive instruction and lead you to repentance. And if, like king Ahaz, "in the time of your distress you trespass yet more against the Lord," 2 Chron. xxviii. 22, your present misery will terminate in that which is greater, dreadful, and endless. If want, and pain, and sickness, and the directions and commands of scripture joined, do not "open your ears to discipline," and make you thoughtful and serious, there is very little hope of you. But if you will yet return to the Lord, he will return to you in mercy, and if you "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," all necessities for this world will be added to you, and the want of some bodily comforts will be easily and cheerfully borne; yea, amply made up by blessings infinitely better. Let me address,

2. *To those who have temporal, but no spiritual prosperity.* This is the case of multitudes and perhaps some of you. You have not only a competency for this world, but affluence. You have a flow of health and cheerfulness, unbroken with pains, uninterrupted by sorrow: yet you forget God, and neglect your souls. All is well with the outward man and its concerns; but the inward man is "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," Rev. iii. 17. You prosper in the world, but you know not God, and are strangers to vital religion. The hurry of your business, or the enjoyment of your pleasures, leaves you no time and no heart for meditation and self-examination, and perhaps none or very little for reading the scriptures and prayer. And it is to be feared that what hath the appearance of devotion in you is all formal, and the heart is not engaged in it. God giveth you health, that you may serve him, and study, learn, and practise his commands, that you may take due care of your souls and prepare for heaven. But you employ it in "making provision for the flesh," gratifying its appetites, and heaping up money. You rise every morning and lie down every evening in health and ease, and never or seldom adore your Preserver, nor seriously think how much you are indebted to him "who is the length of your days, and giveth you all richly to enjoy." You attend not with care and steadfastness to the one thing needful. Instead of faithfully assisting and relieving your poor brethren and strangers, like Gaius, you are sinfully hoarding, or wantonly consuming your substance, and living in pleasure on the earth. You keep your accounts regular with your dealers and customers; but the account standing between God and your souls is never examined and settled. So that you are likely to be bankrupts for ever. And you will find Solomon's observation true, "The turning away," or as the margin better renders

it, "the ease of the simple," or unwise, "shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them," Prov. i. 32. If health and plenty be all your portion from the Lord, you have a wretched portion indeed. And oh think, what will be your case, when he taketh away your souls. What will it avail you to say, with the rich fool in the gospel, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," when this night your souls may be required of you, Luke xii. 19, and you sink into everlasting poverty, sorrow, and despair. Think what a painful reflection this will be in your dying moments, "I have enjoyed long and almost uninterrupted health and vigour; but all hath been devoted to the world and to the flesh. I have gotten a fine fortune, laid up a great deal of money for my children; but I have neglected the religious education of them, set them a bad example, lived without family prayer, ruined my own soul, and helped to ruin theirs. Gold and silver I have enough, but pardon and peace and good hope through grace I am a stranger to. Alas, these are not mine. Oh what a fool and a brute have I been! 'What fruit have I had in the things of which I am now ashamed, and the end of which, I fear, will be everlasting death?' Oh that I had been pained and sickly through all my life, and never had a comfortable day or easy night! Oh that I had been the most needy, diseased beggar that ever came to my door, rather than have starved and murdered my immortal spirit!" May such reflections now impress your hearts, while you have time and space to correct your errors and to act like men. For "what is a man profited," if his body be ever so healthy, "if he should gain the whole world," and enjoy all the pleasures which his heart could desire, and yet "lose his own soul? and what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Let me address,

3. *To those whose souls prosper, but they want temporal prosperity*; who like Gaius, have sickly constitutions, but healthy souls. The instance in the text shows, how unreasonable it is to conclude, that your souls do not prosper, because the outward man doth not. Think not that God hath forsaken you, or that you do not belong to him, because you are poor or sick, or both. This hath been the case of many good men, and God often thus correcteth those of his children in whom he particularly delighteth. Remember, and be thankful to divine grace for it, that you have the main thing; some thing that will amply make up for the want of earthly comforts. If health and plenty be not yours, is this a great matter, while Christ is yours, and pardon and peace are yours, and heaven will at length be yours? God hath denied you some temporal blessings, but he gives you what is infinitely better. When Moses earnestly prayed to go over to Canaan, God makes him this remarkable answer; "Let it suffice thee; speak no more to me of this matter," Deut. iii. 25.

If thou dost not possess these earthly blessings which thou desirest, I will bestow upon thee something better; thou shalt possess heaven, and let that suffice thee. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the restoration of Jerusalem's prosperity, observeth, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick," shall not complain of this lesser evil; "for the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquities," Isa. xxxiii. 24. Consider further, that the want of health and plenty may improve the prosperity of the soul. Afflictions tend to mend the heart. A sickly body often makes a healthy soul. A nobleman of high renown as a soldier and a statesman, once observed, "Some of my acquaintance say, it is pity I am so sickly; and I say of them, when I see how they act, it is a pity they are so well." There is therefore good reason for the apostle's advice, "Count it all joy when you fall into divers tribulations, and let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing," James i. 2. By your afflictions, God is weaning you from the body, and making you more willing to die. And coming out of tribulation, heaven will be more welcome to you, as the safe harbour is to the mariner, after he hath been long tossed in a stormy sea. But be careful, my afflicted brethren, that you do not make your infirmities an excuse for sinful sloth. Do the most you can for God and your souls. Redeem your time, especially in a morning, for the exercises of devotion, which will tend to the improvement of your health, and the prosperity of your souls too. And as you may often be incapable of such reading, prayer, and self-converse as you could wish, improve little intervals of time in devout ejaculations, or short addresses to God by prayer and praise. Embrace every favourable, lively interval for the service of God and doing good to others, and emulate the steadiness and charity of Gaius, that your ministers and pious friends may "rejoice greatly to see that you walk in the truth." Keep a resolute guard upon your temper, especially when your afflictions are peculiarly heavy. Do not expect too much from your physicians, friends, and assistants. Be thankful for all the services which they do, or even attempt to do, for you; and be very careful that you do not make others suffer, merely because you suffer. Let them see that your souls are in health, while the outward man is weakened and perishing, that you are patient and mild, gentle and thankful. Then their attendance upon you will not only be easy and agreeable, but profitable to them. I close this head with those awful, and at the same time comfortable words of our Lord, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which may well awaken prosperous sinners, and comfort afflicted saints; "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented," Luke xvi. 26. Finally, let me address,

4. *To those who have temporal and spiritual prosperity too.* This is a singular instance of the divine goodness to you, and claims your highest gratitude. You are possessed of what a heathen called the supreme happiness of man, "a sound mind in a sound body." Be thankful, my brethren, that you have through divine grace escaped the snares of prosperity and health; that you have been inclined and enabled duly to attend to the care of your souls; and that through the influences of the Holy Spirit, they are in a healthful and flourishing state. Be careful to employ your bodily health and your substance for God, and to be lively and resolute in the discharge of your duty. You have bodies that will answer the demands of the soul, and are not tired and pained with a little application to reading, prayer, and active services. You can come constantly to the house of God, and have not your minds disturbed with anxious cares and fears about a livelihood; nor your attention and devotion interrupted by pains and infirmities. Glorify God in your body and spirit, which by so many claims are his. Labour to improve and increase your spiritual health, to become athletic, vigorous, and established Christians. Honour the Lord with your substance; be generous and hospitable; pity the sick and afflicted, and be careful never to allow yourself in any expressions or conduct to them, which may have the appearance of insult, unkindness, or neglect. For (as one beautifully observeth) "misery is a sacred thing;" and the infirmities of those, who have spent much time and strength in the work of the Lord, have something peculiarly venerable in them. Lay yourselves out to promote the health of your suffering fellow Christians and the good of their souls. And as a public infirmary is happily subservient to both these purposes, being through its wise regulations, a source of health to the souls as well as the bodies of men, I cannot but in this connexion recommend it to your countenance and support. But let me remind you, that though you have enjoyed long and uninterrupted health, yet it will be folly to think that your mountain stands strong and cannot be moved. Attend to Solomon's exhortation; "If a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many," Eccl. xi. 8. Guard therefore against self-indulgence and the love of the world; live in the expectation of changes and death; have your conversation in heaven; and do good to all men as you have opportunity. To close the whole, I entreat you all carefully and constantly to remember and consider that the soul is the man; and that it never is, never can be, truly well with us, till it is well with our souls.

DISCOURSE XXXIII.

THE HYPOCRISY OF DESIRING THE PRAYERS OF OTHERS WITHOUT A SUITABLE CONDUCT.

JEREMIAH XLII. 20.

For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.

IT hath given much concern to many faithful ministers, to observe some persons frequently desiring their prayers, and those of their congregations, who nevertheless appeared at other times to be strangers to the fear of God, very defective in the discharge of their duty, and very little concerned about it. There is too much reason to apprehend, that they place a false and dangerous dependence upon the prayers of others. I have therefore thought it my duty, to lay before you some reflections on this head; to introduce which the words of the text are very pertinent. We read in the beginning of this chapter, that the Jews who were left in their own land, after the greater part of the nation had been carried captive to Babylon, came to Jeremiah the prophet, and desired that he would pray unto the Lord for them, and particularly entreat that God would show them the way of duty. And they bound themselves by a solemn oath, that they would obey the voice of the Lord, whether his commands were agreeable or disagreeable to them (v. 5). Jeremiah accordingly prayed for them, and God gave him directions what he should say to them in his name. But knowing their hypocrisy, and that they were determined to go down to Egypt, contrary to his commands, he informs the prophet of it, who chargeth them with it in the text; “For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.” From whence we may observe, that those may earnestly desire the prayers of God’s ministers and people, who yet dissemble in their hearts, and will not do the commands of God. I shall,

- I. Consider on what principles desiring the prayers of others is grounded;
 - II. When persons may be said to dissemble in their hearts, in desiring them; and,
 - III. Represent to you the hypocrisy and evil of this conduct.
- I am

I. *To consider on what principles desiring the prayers of others is grounded.*

And they are these; that it is our duty to pray for one another; that God hath often shown a gracious regard to the intercessions of his servants for others; and that it is very desirable, especially in some particular cases, to have an interest in them. Desiring the prayers of others intimates a persuasion that it is our duty to pray one for another. This is a dictate of reason. It is natural for men to ask the advice and assistance of their friends in the common affairs of life; to desire them to use their interest with others for them, or join in any petition or application for their benefit. It was common even among the heathen, to wish one another's welfare in their conversation and letters, and to pray for their friends when they offered sacrifice. Several heathen princes sent sacrifices to be offered at Jerusalem, that the Jews might pray for them and their kingdom, Ezra vi. 10; 1 Macc. xii. 11. To pray one for another is a duty expressly required in the word of God. Thus he commanded the captive Jews in Babylon, to "seek the peace of that city, and pray unto the Lord for it," Jer. xxix. 7. "I exhort," saith the apostle Paul, "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God." So the apostle James commands, "Pray one for another." Yea, it is represented as a sin against God, as well as others, to neglect it. Thus Samuel said, "God forbid I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you," 1 Sam. xii. 23. Accordingly, it hath been the pious custom of good men to pray for one another, and to desire one another's prayers. Abraham made intercession for the inhabitants of Sodom; and Hezekiah sent to Isaiah the prophet, to pray for him and his kingdom when the Assyrians invaded them. Thus Christ prayed for his disciples; and St. Paul, in all his epistles, earnestly intercedes for his friends; he tells them, it was his constant custom so to do, and often desires that they would pray for him. The particular places I need not cite in so plain a case. Desiring the prayers of others supposeth that God hath often answered the prayers of good men for others. Good men are dear to God, and he loveth them. They have an interest in heaven, and God hath often granted to others what they have desired for them. It is, indeed, a part of his wise and righteous constitution of government, that others should be favoured for the sake of good men, and be benefited by their piety and prayers. Thus God commanded Abimelech to restore Abraham his wife, saying, "He is a prophet and shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live," Gen. xx. 7. So he commanded Job's friends, "Go to my servant Job, and he shall pray for you, for him will I accept." We have many instances in scripture of the intercessions of good men for others, and of the efficacy of them. Thus when Moses prayed for Israel Amalek was van-

quished, the fire which burnt in the camp was quenched, the plague was stayed, and the destructive serpents were removed. When he interceded for Miriam her leprosy was healed. When he prayed for Pharaoh the plagues of Egypt, one after another, were taken away. Yea, God was so influenced by Moses' prayers for Israel, that he saith unto him, "Let me alone, that I may consume them," *Exod. xxxii. 10*; as if he could not do it while Moses continued praying for them. So in Hezekiah's time, when many of the people did eat the passover otherwise than it was commanded, Hezekiah prayed for them, "that the good Lord would pardon them. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah and healed the people," *2 Chron. xxx. 20*. This truth is likewise implied in a prohibition frequently laid upon the prophet Jeremiah, not to pray for the rebellious Israelites, since God was determined to destroy them; "Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me; for I will not hear thee;" "The Lord said unto me, Pray not for this people for their good." In like manner he said, by the same prophet, "Though Moses and Samuel," those successful intercessors for Israel, "stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people," *Jer. vii. 16, xiv. 11, xv. 1*. We read in the New Testament, that St. Peter was delivered from prison by the prayers of the church; and St. Paul was rescued from the violent death which he expected, the Corinthians "helping together by their prayers," *2 Cor. i. 11*. It is upon this principle that the intercession of Christ is founded. The Father loveth him, and heareth him always, and thus he continually obtaineth favours for his church and people. Once more, it supposeth that it is very desirable, especially in some particular cases, to have the prayers of others for us. This general supposition is well grounded, namely, that we reap advantage by their good wishes. It is very desirable to have a share in the prayers of those who are truly pious, whom therefore the Lord loveth, and to whose addresses his ears are always open. But there are some circumstances when this is peculiarly desirable; as when, through great pain or weakness of body, we are not able to pray for ourselves; when, through perplexity or distress of mind, our thoughts are broken, interrupted, and confused; and, as Elihu expresseth it, "we cannot order our speech to him by reason of darkness," *Job xxxvii. 19*. In cases of great importance and difficulty, it is desirable to have the concurrence of the prayers of others with our own; that, as these Jews expressed it, "the Lord may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do" (*v. 23*). And I think we may derive some encouragement to joint intercession in very important cases, from the promise of Christ to his apostles, though it may immediately refer to some miraculous confirmation of their decisions; "If two of you

shall agree on earth, as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven," Matt. xviii. 19. On these principles, desiring the prayers of others is grounded; that it is our duty to pray one for another; that God hath often answered the prayers of good men for others; and it is very desirable, especially in some particular cases, to have an interest in them. I proceed to show,

II. *When they who desire the prayers of others may be said to dissemble in their hearts.*

Now they do so when they desire them without sincerity; when they will not pray for themselves; when they will not use proper means to obtain the blessings they desire; and especially when they will not do what God by his word and ministers requireth.

They dissemble in their hearts who ask the prayers of others without sincerity, or without such a serious sense of the knowledge and providence of God as becometh those who desire his favour; particularly when they ask them through form and custom, because they have heard others do so, or know it to be the usual practice of their fellow-Christians in like circumstances; and that in some cases it would appear wrong, and almost profane, if they did not. When it is intended merely as a compliment, or piece of respect to their ministers and friends, and only designed to express the good opinion they have of their piety and superior interest in heaven. But men especially dissemble in their hearts when this is done under pretence of humility; to express the low opinion they entertain of themselves, when they do not really entertain such an opinion; when they design to lead those, whose prayers they entreat, to think them wiser and better, more sensible of God's universal providence, and more concerned about his favour than they really are. Perhaps I may range under this head those who only desire their friends to pray for them, that they may be delivered from some bodily affliction, or other temporal evil, but desire not their prayers for spiritual blessings, for the improvement of their graces, and for those influences from above, which may contribute to the salvation of their souls. In this case there may be some room to question their sincerity, at least whether they have a due apprehension of the nature of religion, and the importance of eternal concerns. Otherwise, instead of desiring prayer for the removal of affliction only, they would address their pious friends in some such language as this; "I am sensible I have a great deal of pride, passion, or impatience, covetous desires, and bad habits; and should be glad of the assistance of your prayers that I may subdue them; and that my afflictions may be the means of making my heart better." Thus Jeroboam, king of Israel, entreated the prophet to pray for him, that his withered hand might be restored; but not that

his sin in burning incense might be forgiven, 1 Kings xiii. 6. So Simon Magus entreated Peter to pray for him, that the judgments threatened might not come upon him; but seemed unconcerned about his covetous and hypocritical dispositions, Acts viii. 24. May I not here add, that the instances of those who desire to return public praise for mercies vouchsafed to them, after having been prayed for by the congregation, are so very few, except in some particular cases, that there is just reason to suspect the want of sincere devotion and gratitude in their hearts? Though "in the time of trouble they are willing to visit the Lord, and pour out a prayer, when his chastening is upon them," Isa. xxvi. 16, yet they are not solicitous publicly to give glory to God for his delivering and preserving goodness, and to express before others their purpose to "render to the Lord according to the benefits done unto them." It is therefore to be feared that their hearts are not right with God in desiring the prayers of the congregation. So of the ten lepers, who earnestly prayed that Christ would have mercy on them and heal them, only one returned to give glory to God for the wonderful cure, Luke xvii. 18. Again, men dissemble in their hearts in asking the prayers of others, when they will not pray for themselves; when they live in a general forgetfulness of God, neglect public worship or secret devotion; and perhaps plead their bodily infirmities as an excuse for this neglect; when it plainly appears, by their conduct, that these infirmities do not unfit them for other kinds of business, which require equal, or more strength. They perhaps think, that having the prayers of a minister or of the church will excuse their own; and these they desire, when they will not so much as offer up a prayer for themselves; though a sigh or a groan from a devout heart is prayer, and acceptable to God, when the petitioner hath strength for nothing more. This is the case of those "who will not use proper means to obtain the blessings they desire. For instance, some entreat their friends to pray that God would restore their health; when they will not use proper food, physic, or exercise, but continue to do what is injurious to their health. Others desire prayers, that prosperity and comfort may be restored to them; when they will not be thoughtful, diligent, and frugal, and guide their affairs with discretion. They will take no pains with their hearts, to govern their passions; though, on due self-government and a becoming behaviour to all around them, their health, their peace, their worldly interest, and their enjoying the blessing of God, may depend. Once more, this is especially the case of those who will not do what God by his word and ministers requireth. This was the character of the persons spoken of in the text. The Jews desired Jeremiah to pray for them, and promised to "obey the voice of God, whether it were good or evil," that is, agreeable or disagreeable to them (v. 5, 6);

but at the same time they were resolutely determined that they would take their own way, and go down to Egypt, contrary to the command of God. Thus many desire the intercession of their friends, whose good advice they will not follow. They entreat the prayers of ministers; but will not do what they, in the name and by the authority of God, require of them. So Pharaoh said to Moses, "Entreat the Lord to remove the plague, and I will let you go;" nevertheless he was even then determined not to let them go, but "hardened his heart and sinned yet more," Exod. ix. 28. Many desire their friends to intercede for them; but will not part with those lusts which they have indulged, and for which they have been admonished; nor practise those duties to which they have been exhorted. Thus some have declared, and would persuade their friends, that they choose to travel on the Lord's day, merely that they may have the prayers of the church for them. Yet they well know that God hath expressly forbidden travelling on that day, except in cases of absolute necessity; and that the church, after the minister hath read the fourth commandment, prays that God would "incline their hearts to keep that law." What can this conduct be called, but vile hypocrisy, as well as an insult upon the understandings of their friends? These particulars show who may justly be said to dissemble in their hearts in desiring the intercessions of their friends. It is the case of those who desire them without sincerity, as a matter of form; who will not pray for themselves; nor use proper means to obtain the blessings they desire; and especially of those who will not act and behave, as God by his word and ministers commands. I am now,

III. *To show the hypocrisy and evil of this conduct.*

And here I would observe, that it is an affront to the all-seeing and holy God; it is likewise deceiving their friends; and prayers offered for such persons are not likely to be of much avail.

1. It is a high affront to the all-seeing and holy God. "He is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that draw nigh to him." Every transaction with the infinite, eternal *JEHOVAH*, should be most serious and solemn. He is so holy and so awful a Being, that to trifle and prevaricate with him is the highest insolence and profaneness. He knows what views and designs men have in desiring their friends to intercede for them. Now consider, what is the meaning and intention of prayer? When you desire the supplications of others, is it not your meaning, that you hope God will hear them on account of their piety; and that you desire his favour, and hope to receive from his hands whatever may be for your good, because you are willing and resolved to be obedient and submissive? Is it not

affronting him to desire prayer and not mean this? To hope for his favour without complying with those terms on which alone you have encouragement to expect it? Can the Searcher of hearts be pleased with your pretending one thing and meaning another? "If I regard iniquity in my heart," saith David, "the Lord will not hear me." And if you persist in any thing which you know to be contrary to the will of God, and neglect any branch of duty, you regard iniquity in your heart. And if he will not hear your own prayers amidst such hypocrisy, it is not probable that he should hear those of another for you. This conduct is indeed mocking God; and you may see how he resented it, in the case of these Jews: "Ye dissembled in your hearts," saith the prophet, in desiring my prayers; "now therefore know certainly, that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go" (v. 21). If you are not fully determined to hearken to what he requires, and immediately and vigorously apply yourselves to do his will, you offer an insult to the omniscient and holy God. He will not indeed be angry at your friends for coming to him on your account; but he will be angry at you for sending them, while you thus dissemble. God hateth hypocrisy above every thing else.

2. This conduct is deceiving and grieving their friends, whose prayers they desire. It is true indeed your ministers and friends cannot discern your hearts. They are willing to hope the best, and charitably believe that you desire their intercessions from good principles, and with upright intentions. But if they perceive the contrary, they will have no heart to pray for you; at least not in the manner you desire. If they have any reason to suspect the contrary, they can do it with very little comfort and hope of success. Were you to employ them on a message to a fellow-creature, to desire a favour of him for you, and that desire expressed or implied a promise on your part which you never intended to fulfil, would this be using them well? Might they not be justly displeased and affronted to be sent on such a message? and would you not hazard the loss of their friendship? I fear all faithful ministers sometimes meet with cases of this kind. Some desire their prayers in times of affliction, who paid little regard to their instructions before; and even then, manifest no repentance, faith, or patience; nor express any concern to be made better by their afflictions. And some who do express such a concern, return to their folly and wickedness again when the affliction is removed. Thus they show too plainly, that they "dissembled in their hearts." Such treatment might justly excite the resentment of their praying friends; it always excites their grief.

Prayers offered for such persons are not likely to be of much avail. What is rendered in the text, "Ye dissembled in your

hearts," may be translated (as in the margin), "You have used deceit against your own souls." Your expectations will be in vain, your guilt aggravated, and God will be provoked to inflict heavier calamities. How can you expect that God should hear others speaking to him on your behalf, when you will not hearken to what they say to you in his name; or even to what he himself says to you in his word? I allow, indeed, that though men dissemble in their hearts, the intercessions of their pious friends may do them some service. They may prevail to obtain the removal or mitigation of some afflictions which they labour under. God may spare them, and by his Holy Spirit strive with them, longer than he otherwise have done. He may afford them some peculiar opportunities and advantages for the sake of the intercessions of others. But as to future and eternal blessings, these will be of no avail. Though we have never so many prayers put up for us, we are not likely to receive any benefit by them, as to our eternal interest and happiness, if we will not be persuaded to do what God commandeth; unless we add our own fervent supplications and diligent and constant endeavours. I wish that servants, whom Providence hath kindly fixed in praying families, would seriously consider this; that they may not live without private devout prayer. Many weak persons think, that if they have but the prayers of the church, or a minister to pray with them in their last moments, all will be well, and their eternal state be happy; though they have cast off the fear of God, restrained prayer before him, and through all their lives "dissembled in their hearts." But this is a fatal delusion. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for what a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Let no man deceive you with vain words; he that doeth righteousness is righteous." And as to him that "turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination," Prov. xxviii. 9; and then it cannot be expected that the prayers of others should save him. Indeed St. James saith, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," for those who are the subjects of it; but he seems principally to refer to those prayers which arose from an extraordinary and miraculous faith in the divine power to recover the sick; for he had just before observed, that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." But no prayers will avail to the final salvation of an impenitent sinner. Thus do they, who desire the prayers of others, without proper dispositions and resolutions, affront the great and holy God; deceive and grieve their friends, whose prayers they ask; and will reap no great and lasting advantage from them.

APPLICATION.

1. *We may hence learn, with what dispositions of mind we should desire the prayers of others.* From what hath been said it ap-

pears, that to desire them is very proper and becoming; and that they may be very beneficial to us. God hath made it our duty to pray one for another; which he would never have done, unless it had been useful to those purposes which seem to be most directly designed by it. It cannot be worthily performed without some efficacy and success. Besides, desiring the prayers of others puts an honour upon prayer, and manifests the esteem we have for our brethren. But like many other good things, it is too much degenerated into a mere form. Whenever we ask the intercessions of others, let it be in sincerity; with a firm persuasion of the power of prayer; that it is not in vain to seek God; and that it is our duty to engage the assistance of our friends, by their application to the throne of grace. Be solicitous that you concur with them by praying yourselves without ceasing in the best manner you are able; and with your chief dependence for acceptance, not on your own prayers, nor those of your friends, but the mediation of Jesus Christ. Ask the prayers of others, under your various difficulties and distresses, with a sincere desire and resolution to do the most you can to help yourselves; to hearken to the advice of your friends, and to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." If you desire to reap any advantage by the prayers of your ministers, let it be your resolution and care to hearken to their preaching, and to do what God by them requireth, "whether it be good or evil," agreeable or disagreeable. Then you may hope that God whose gracious title it is, that he is "a God hearing prayer," will give you an answer of peace, Ps. lxxv. 2. We may learn,

2. *That we should be ready to pray one for another.* I have before observed, that this is our duty, and that it hath been the practice of good men in all ages. Jeremiah was pleased with this request of these Jews, that he would pray unto the Lord for them; and readily went to the throne of grace on their account. Let us likewise be careful to perform this pious and friendly office; and to do it conscientiously towards God, with all charity, kindness, and affection towards one another. It is our duty to pray daily for all men; especially for our friends and brethren; and this, whether they desire our prayers or not. Whenever we think of an absent relation or friend, or hear of him, or receive a letter from him, let us lift up our hearts to God for him in a short petition, as his circumstances may require. But we should be particularly mindful of those who desire our prayers. We should charitably hope that they do not dissemble in that desire. If we should suspect that they do, still let us pray for them; entreating God to search and try them, to show them what is amiss, and enable them to correct it. Let us ask for them not only those particular favours which they desire us to pray for, but whatever else we think may be needful and convenient for them. This is but a proper return for the esteem which they express for

us. Our intercessions may be serviceable to them, as I have already observed. They will certainly be of use to ourselves, improve our own spirits, promote a benevolent disposition in us, and preserve us from every thing overbearing, unkind, and unfriendly. They will make us tender of the ease, reputation, and comfort of others, and excite us to do them all the good we can ourselves, while we wish them the favourable assistance of Providence. Yea, they may bring down the favours of heaven upon ourselves and our families. Thus our prayers will, as David expresseth it, "return into our own bosom," Ps. xxxv. 13. We may also obtain considerable advantage by their prayers, offered in return for ours, or for any other kindness we do them. So when Job is describing his own liberality to the poor, he saith, "The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me;" Job xxix. 13; that is, I reaped some advantage by his prayers; I obtained the blessings he sought for me. What our Lord saith of friendly salutations is justly applicable to prayer. "If the house we salute be worthy, our peace shall come upon it; but if it be not worthy, our peace shall return to us," Luke x. 5, 6; that is, we shall gain some benefit by our pious wishes for them, if they do not. In short, if we desire to profit our friends by our prayers, let us labour after universal and eminent holiness. "The prayer of the upright is God's delight," and in proportion to our piety will be our success. The many instances of efficacious prayers in scripture plainly prove this, and it becomes us seriously to consider it. I only add under this head, that we really dissemble in our hearts, while praying for our friends, except we be ready to supply their wants, and do what we can to direct, help, and comfort them. Mr. Pope indeed hath said, that "persons seldom talk of praying for their friends when they have done them a service, but when they will not do it." But whoever is acquainted with the word of God, and the nature and efficacy of prayer, will consider even praying for them as an important service. But not to do more, when we have it in our power, is dissembling and hypocrisy. So the apostle James saith, "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to them, Depart in peace; be ye warmed and filled," that is, wishes them well and prays for them; "but giveth them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?" James ii. 16. "My little children," saith another apostle, "let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth," 1 John iii. 18. Once more,

3. *It is peculiarly wicked to dissemble in our hearts, when we profess dependence on the intercession of Christ.* Some have with great ignorance or perverseness argued against the use of prayer, because Christ interceded for us. But his intercession was designed, not to supersede our prayers, but to encourage them and render them acceptable. His incense is offered up "with the

prayers of all the saints," Rev. viii. 3. He maketh intercession for "all that come to God by him," Heb. vii. 25; not for those that never come at all. To depend on his intercession, while you neglect prayer; or offer it in a formal, careless manner; or live in the violation of any of his precepts; is making him the minister of sin, and is the greatest indignity to his holy character, and to his office as Mediator. Your friends cannot tell whether you dissemble or not, when you ask their prayers; but Christ cannot be deceived. "He knoweth what is in man." The intercession of Christ himself will not prevail for the salvation of any wilful impenitent sinner. Indeed he will not intercede for such a one. He is too wise and holy an Advocate to plead in a bad cause. He himself hath expressly declared, and with his words I conclude, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord! Lord!" that warmly professeth relation to me, and dependence upon me, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven," Matt. vii. 21.

DISCOURSE XXXIV.

HEZEKIAH'S SUCCESSFUL PRAYER FOR THE ISRAELITES.

2 CHRON. xxx. 18—20.

They ate the passover otherwise than it was written: but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

OF this king Hezekiah we read, that "he was magnified in the sight of all nations," 2 Chron. xxxii. 23. He appeared great and honourable, when he defeated the Philistines; when he fortified the city of Jerusalem, and supplied it with water; when God healed his threatening sickness, and destroyed the Assyrian army which besieged Jerusalem; and when he received presents from many nations about him. But he never appeared so truly and eminently great and honourable, as in the light in which our text represents him. We see this pious and good prince, like the father of his people, summoning them together to keep the Lord's passover, according to the law of Moses. We see him leading the way in religious services, and interceding for some of the people, who were not so exact as they should have been in the observance of some appointments of the law. The story is very remarkable and instructive. He sent messengers, not only through his own kingdom of Judah, but through the neighbouring kingdom of Israel, to summon the people to Jerusalem to celebrate the passover, as it had been for a long time

neglected. Many of the Israelites "mocked Hezekiah's messengers and laughed them to scorn;" yet others "humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem" (v. 10, 11). But all Judah, through the hand of God upon them, came unanimously into the proposal, "to do the command of the king and the princes by the word of the Lord" (v. 12). Accordingly the passover was kept the fourteenth day of the second month. This was a month later than the law required it to be kept; but as the people could not be assembled soon enough to keep it in the former month, it was judged better to keep it in the second, than omit it for that year. They thought themselves vindicated in this, because the law itself allowed those who were unclean in the first month to eat it in the second, Numb. ix. 10, 11. Another irregular circumstance is taken notice of in the text, which I propose more largely to consider. Many of the people, especially from the land of Israel, had not cleansed themselves; yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written; but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."

Here are three particulars which deserve our attention. The irregularity which some of the people were guilty of; Hezekiah's prayer for them; and the success of that prayer. Let us consider,

I. *The irregularity which some of the people were guilty of.*

"A multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written." The law of Moses required divers washings and purifications for ceremonial uncleanness. The Israelites were obliged to be very exact in the observance of these, especially when they appeared before God at their great feasts. Some of the persons spoken of in the text might be defiled by the touch of a dead body: some, by other uncleannesses mentioned in the law, under which circumstances they were forbidden to eat the passover. The people who came from the kingdom of Israel, or the ten tribes, knew but little of the law. Their wicked princes had established idolatry, and in a great measure destroyed all devout regard to Jehovah, the God of Israel. The few pious persons among them that worshipped Jehovah might be unacquainted with the particular laws relating to the passover, and the purification required of those that were to eat it; that solemn rite having been so long disused among them. They were not purified according to the strictness of the law. There was some uncleanness in them, that was not known, or not sufficiently attended to, till after-

wards. On this account God gave a visible token of his displeasure: probably by sending some sickness upon them. This was intended to convince them of their error, to promote their humiliation, to make them more cautious for the future, and thus recover the veneration due to this ordinance, Observe,

II. *Hezekiah's prayer for them.*

He was much concerned that every thing might be done in due order, as far as could be, and grieved to observe any irregularities. His piety and zeal had called the people together. It was a great pleasure to him to see his own subjects unanimously obeying his summons, and especially to see so many good men coming out of the neighbouring kingdom on this occasion. As they had humbled themselves for their past neglect, were come to Jerusalem, and expressed a pious desire to eat the Lord's passover, he was willing they should do it, lest they should be discouraged, and because this service might be a means of confirming them in their allegiance to the true God, when so many of their fellow-subjects in Israel were sunk into shameful idolatry. Observing nevertheless the defect of purification, it put him upon prayer for them, and the particulars of his prayer are very observable. He humbly entreats God to pardon the errors they were guilty of; he encouraged his hope by a view of the divine goodness; and he pleads the preparation of their hearts, as what was chiefly regarded. He humbly entreats God to pardon their errors, that "they were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." This was something different from that moral, internal purity, which they were acknowledged to have. They were under some defilements, which rendered them improper subjects of the ordinance, until they had used such means to purify themselves as were prescribed to all that came to God's holy place. Their eating in these circumstances was contrary to the law of Moses, contrary to the reverence due to God's authority and majesty, and what he might justly be displeased with. The pious prince therefore earnestly entreats his forgiveness, that he would not impute this error to them, but graciously accept their services notwithstanding. Further, he encourageth his hopes by a view of the divine goodness. "The good Lord pardon every one." This title of Jehovah hath a peculiar beauty and propriety in this connexion. God had always been very good to Israel. He had, in the most solemn manner, proclaimed his name to them by Moses as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." On this Hezekiah grounded his hope of obtaining forgiveness for the people, especially as their sin was a sin of ignorance, or only occasioned by an eager desire to join with their brethren in performing a duty which had been long neglected. He hoped

that "the good Lord," who had so often shown himself ready to forgive sin, would forgive this also, lest their hearts should be cast down, and the reformation which appeared among the people should in any respect be hindered. Once more, he pleads the preparation of the heart, as what was chiefly regarded. "They had prepared their hearts to seek God, the Lord God of their fathers." They had sought to Jehovah, the living and true God, and not to idols. They had sought Jehovah, as "the God of their fathers;" the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose seed they now showed themselves to be. They came up to Jerusalem amidst the scorn and contempt of their brethren, who would laugh at them, as the dupes of Hezekiah's policy, or as righteous over-much. He pleads, that they had "prepared their hearts;" that their views and intentions were worthy and good; that they had taken pains to humble themselves before God, and to be in a right frame for religious services. He intimates in his plea, that the external rites, though fit to be observed, were required chiefly for the sake of the heart, to represent the necessity of inward purity and preparation, and to preserve upon the minds of God's people a due sense of his holiness. Now as these pious persons had the main qualification for acceptable worship, he hoped the *good* Lord would graciously pass by their errors and accept their services. Let us observe,

III. *The success of this prayer.*

"And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah and healed the people." He gave them some favourable, visible sign, that he accepted their services, perhaps by immediately healing their sicknesses. Or the expression may only signify, that he forgave them. The scripture useth the word "healing" for granting pardon, or freeing men from the guilt of sin, which is the disease and sickness of the soul. So we read of being "converted and healed." And besides forgiveness, it includes restoring comfort and hope. Thus God saith, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him, and restore comfort to him." Thus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, is said to arise "with healing in his wings" or beams; that is, bringing salvation, health, and peace to the soul. God was pleased with the pious concern which Hezekiah showed for his honour, and the people's happiness. Therefore he accepted his prayer for them, and pitied and forgave their errors. These are the particulars contained in the text; the irregularity which several pious Israelites were guilty of, in not complying with some rites of the law of Moses; Hezekiah's prayer, that they might be forgiven by "the good Lord," because their hearts were sincere; and the success of this prayer; the Lord heard it, and healed and accepted the people. I now proceed to point out the improvement to be made of these particulars.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let this history engage us to seek the God of our fathers, by observing all his ordinances.* As we are the creatures and subjects of Jehovah, the great God of heaven and earth, he hath a right to our service and homage, and authority to direct in what way he will be worshipped and served. As his children we are to love and honour him; as his servants, to fear him; and as both, to obey his commands, and comply with his institutions. As he is "the Lord God of our fathers," he hath a further claim to our homage and obedience, and viewing him under this character gives us further encouragement to seek him. Our fathers, as far they were pious and good, sought him and they found him; experienced his goodness and enjoyed his favour. They also solemnly devoted us to God and his service; taught us his fear and the religion of his son Jesus. They have often assured us of his kindness and grace, and invited us to "taste and see that the Lord is good," and that his ordinances are the support, nourishment, and delight of the soul. Let us then pay our duty and submission to his will, and labour to be "righteous before God, walking in all his statutes and ordinances blameless." He requires us to pray to him and to praise him, to assemble ourselves together for social worship, and to keep the sabbath day holy to him. The Lord Jesus Christ, whom he hath appointed head and king of the church, and to whom he hath given authority to execute judgment, requires us to be once entered among his disciples and subjects by baptism, and frequently to remember our absent friend and Lord, and commemorate his death, by eating bread and drinking wine in our religious assemblies. By complying with these institutions we are to seek God. The Lord's supper may naturally be called the Christian passover. As the Jewish passover was a serious recollection and commemoration of God's delivering the families of Israel from destruction, by passing over their houses, when he destroyed the first born in every family in Egypt, so the Lord's supper is a recollection and thankful commemoration of our deliverance from sin and hell by the death of Christ. The paschal lamb, of which the Israelites were to eat at that feast, was a type of Christ. Accordingly the apostle Paul saith, "Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us," 1 Cor. v. 7. As God required all the Israelites to eat the passover, so he requires all Christians to commemorate the death of their Lord. While we see so many of them neglecting this duty, one would be ready to suspect, there was something extremely dark and obscure in the command itself, and that there was room for much doubt and controversy about the meaning of this institution. Yet certain it is, that there is not a more plain and express command in the whole scriptures, than what relates to the Lord's supper,

“Do this in remembrance of me;” eat bread and drink wine, in your religious assemblies, in a devout commemoration of the death of Christ. Every considerate person would naturally think, that the command was expressed in such plain language, on purpose that there might be no room to debate, or even doubt concerning the meaning of it, and that there might be no excuse for disobeying it. I would therefore, as a messenger from the great King, address those who neglect this ordinance, as Hezekiah’s messengers did the Israelites (v. 8), “Be ye not stiff-necked;” set not up your own judgment in opposition to that of Christ; “but yield yourselves unto the Lord: and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever, and serve the Lord your God.” I have no apprehension, that any of you will mock me and laugh me to scorn, as some of the Israelites did Hezekiah’s messengers (v. 10); yet I fear you will not comply with the message, and obey the summons of the most High. Remember, therefore, that God testified his displeasure against the Israelites for not complying with his law to purify themselves, though they did eat the passover. Had they entirely neglected the passover, his displeasure would have been greater. Oh that “the hand of God may be upon you,” as it was upon Judah (v. 12), “to give you one heart to do this” and every other commandment, “according to the word of the Lord.”

2. *Let this subject make us solicitous to prepare our hearts for every religious solemnity.* “God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” In all our approaches to God, the intentions and dispositions of the heart are to be regarded in the first place. It is necessary that we be sincere and upright in every act of religion. For these are the declarations of his word, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord;” “If we regard iniquity in our heart, he will not hear our prayers;” “Whoever is a worshipper of God and doeth his will, him he heareth.” Besides the general good disposition of the heart, some particular preparation of it may be proper, where persons’ circumstances will admit of it; in order to make their worship peculiarly spiritual, lively, and advantageous. The human heart, in the present state of our nature and of the world in which we live, is not disposed to seek God: it is rather alienated from his fear, and love, and service. Therefore it is desirable that some pains should be taken with it, to bring it into a good frame for religious services; particularly by endeavouring to remove, as far as possible, all anxiety and cares about this world; by seriously considering the nature of that Being whom we are going to seek, the errand on which we approach him, and the design of those ordinances on which we are to attend. For “God is greatly to be feared and to be had in reverence in the assembly of his saints;” and “he will be sanctified by all that come near to him.” The only necessary

qualifications for partaking of the Christian passover, the Lord's supper, are a knowledge of its nature and design, and a sincere desire and resolution to comply with its design, and to behave becoming the gospel. Accordingly the apostle, having observed that "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," adds, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," 1 Cor. v. 8. It will promote our edification by this ordinance, to read the history of Christ's sufferings contained in the evangelists; and that view of the design of them which is given us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, especially the ninth and tenth chapters, and to meditate upon this most interesting subject. It will conduce to our acceptable worship, and our profiting by every religious service, previously to offer up our earnest prayers to God, that he would prepare our hearts; that he would fix our thoughts, excite and maintain devout affections in us, and enable us to live suitably to our prayers and our engagements: remembering what Solomon observeth, that "the preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord," Prov. xvi. 1.

3. *Let this subject encourage those whose hearts are prepared to seek God*; that is, who are habitually disposed and ready to join in religious services, though they may not have such ability or such leisure for particular preparation as they could wish. A sincere and pious heart is the great thing to be desired; the true "purification of the sanctuary." Indeed it is the only thing necessary to make our religious services acceptable and useful. Under the law, particular cleanness and forms of purification were required; and it was criminal to neglect them. But the gospel is free from all these ceremonial rites. It requires inward, moral purity, and indeed on this the great stress was laid even under the law, Isa. i. 16, &c. If the heart be right with God, and the conversation becoming the gospel, a Christian is always qualified to join in divine worship and sacred institutions. It is left to every man's discretion, to devote more or less time to previous meditation and devotional exercises. In this case every one must judge what his own abilities and circumstances will admit. But it can be no substantial reason for neglecting sacred services, especially the Lord's supper, that there was not sufficient time or ability for a particular preparation, because in fact that is not required. We are commanded to "do this in remembrance of Christ;" to do it often, as often as that Christian church with which we join in communion doth it. But there is no command about any previous religious exercises suited to that service. Indeed St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to "examine themselves, and so," that is, as the word signifies, according to our Lord's institution, "to eat of that bread and drink of that cup." But in this advice he evidently refers to a gross perversion of the Lord's supper among them. They mixed this

supper with their own, as if it was a common meal, merely to satisfy their hunger and thirst; not attending to the religious purposes for which it was instituted. He therefore exhorts them to consider the nature and design of this ordinance, and what they were going to perform, that they might do it with due seriousness and solemnity. As we are in no danger of such a profanation of the ordinance, all that is necessary for us is, to endeavour to understand the nature of the service, and to see that the heart be right, the intention honest, and that the feast be kept in sincerity and truth. There may be, there will be, defects and infirmities in the best Christians, even after the most serious and diligent preparation. The cares of the world will intrude. Afflictions and sorrows will often depress the spirits, and the heart will not be in so good a frame as could be desired. Yet he who is truly and habitually concerned to obey and please the great God, to do honour to Christ as his Saviour and Lord, and with purpose of heart to cleave to him, is always prepared for this service and always welcome to it. He is truly cleansed according to the purification of the gospel sanctuary, or the Christian church, and he will eat the gospel passover "as it is written," as Christ hath directed. His daily devotions, if sincere, prepare him for any public religious exercises. To neglect the Lord's supper contrary to the command of Christ, at any of the stated seasons of celebrating it, is certainly more criminal than to attend to it without such previous preparation, as even some good men may judge expedient and desirable. In this view, I cannot but look upon many treatises on this subject, especially those called "Week's Preparations," as very mischievous books, though they might be written with a good intention. For they naturally lead persons to conclude, that just so much reading and devotion are absolutely necessary, and that none can be acceptable worshippers and devout receivers without it, for which conclusion there is not the least foundation in the New Testament. Therefore many neglect the ordinance, when they have not ability or leisure for such exercises. It may also be justly questioned, whether the custom of many Christian churches to observe days of fasting and preparation, and to attend sermons and prayers previous to receiving the Lord's supper and with a particular view to that service, be not superstitious, and the remainder of popish error and corruption. For it is very probable that this modern custom had never been introduced into the churches, had it not been for the absurd doctrine of transubstantiation; or that the bread and wine, upon being consecrated by the priest, are changed into the true and real body and blood of Christ. Thus this sacrament became truly formidable. There is good reason to suspect that this custom, and that unscriptural and unjustifiable one of ministers examining men's principles and hearts before they are admitted to the Lord's supper, have

done much harm to young persons, and serious, timorous spirits, by giving them terrifying ideas of this service, discouraging them from joining in it, or leading them to do it with so much doubt and fear, as hath made it both uncomfortable and unprofitable. There seems no ground for such public preparatory exercises either in the nature of the thing, or the gospel of Christ. It is evident that no such custom was ever found in the primitive churches; nor could there be, as they communicated every Lord's day. Let those who choose to observe such seasons lay no more stress on them than in reason they ought; and never censure others for the non-observance of them. It seems very surprising that those who contend for the necessity or great importance of peculiar religious exercises, preparatory to the Lord's supper, do not practise these, or think them necessary, when they bring their children to be baptized. Now this seems a strange inconsistency; and is making a difference between the two sacraments, which neither their nature nor the authority of Christ makes: though I have known a few pious parents, who have herein acted at least consistently. It is very desirable, that Christians should be taught and often reminded not to be zealous for those exercises and observances which our great Master and lawgiver hath not expressly required. This is being "wise above what is written;" and, in effect, reflecting upon his wisdom and care of his church. It hath also a tendency to lead them, and actually leads many, to censure or despise their fellow-Christians, who are of a different judgment in this matter; and when they do so, they certainly want the purification of the gospel sanctuary. They cannot be acceptable worshippers and communicants with such uncharitable hearts. Let us, in this and every other ordinance, as the apostle exhorts, "come boldly to the throne of grace," sensible that "the good Lord" "knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust;" and if there be a sincere and willing mind, he will accept our services and forgive our many infirmities.

4. *Let this subject excite those who have the care of others to watch over them and pray for them.* Hezekiah acted like the faithful friend and tender father of his subjects, by the concern he showed for their obedience to the divine law, and for the pardon of their errors. He setteth a good example before Christian ministers; and instructs them to endeavour, that their hearers may be exact and circumspect in observing all religious institutions; that they keep the middle way between superstition on one side, that is, placing religion in things in which it doth not consist; and carelessness and irreverence on the other. Ministers should guard, on the one hand, against discouraging well-disposed youth, and any honest, timorous minds; and on the other, encouraging the conceited, the censorious, and the vicious. They are also to be intercessors with God for their flocks; that

he would pardon their infirmities and accept their services. Hezekiah setteth a good example before parents also ; to teach their children to "seek the Lord God of their fathers" betimes ; and to encourage them to know him and serve him with upright hearts and willing minds. They are likewise to be intercessors with God for them ; that he would accept their feeble attempts of prayer and praise, and forgive their childish follies. And be very careful, Christian parents, while you recommend your children to the compassion of "the good Lord," that you imitate it yourselves ; that you be good, kind, and tender-hearted to your children, and not "provoke them to anger" by severity, "lest they be discouraged." Finally, Christian friends, especially those who are members of the same church, should, like Hezekiah, quicken one another to the Lord's work, and encourage and animate all who appear serious and well-disposed, though they have some infirmities, especially the young. If they see their friends deficient in the discharge of their duty, neglecting ordinances, or coming without due seriousness and reverence, they ought to admonish them and pray for them. To excite you to this, observe what the story we have been considering plainly suggests ; that God hath a great regard to the intercession of his faithful servants. It was Hezekiah's piety and zeal, not his rank and grandeur, that made his prayer so successful. The prayers of a beggar are as acceptable to God as the prayers of a prince, if they are offered up with equal sincerity and fervour. We are commanded to "pray one for another." Intercession for others is a proper acknowledgment of God's providence and grace ; and a becoming expression of our benevolence to our fellow Christians. It will enlarge our contracted hearts, and increase our kind affections towards them. It will also make us more cautious in our conduct to them, as well as more watchful of our whole conversation ; that there may be a consistency between our prayers and all our behaviour both towards God and man. I conclude the discourse with those encouraging words of the Psalmist ; "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble ; thou wilt prepare their heart ; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear," Ps. x. 17.

DISCOURSE XXXV.

A SERIOUS DISSUASIVE FROM FREQUENTING THE PLAYHOUSE.

2 TIMOTHY II. 16.

But shun profane and vain babblings ; for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

WHEN any infectious, fatal distemper becomes epidemical, it is the part of humanity to offer a sure preventive. When iniquity abounds, and there is imminent danger of being infected with its deadly contagion, especially when it is conveyed in the vehicle of diversion, it is the duty of a faithful friend to warn all to whom he hath access, especially the young and unstable, against the specious delusion. I hope therefore, my friends, that you will not only bear with me, but do me the justice to believe, that I am acting a friendly part and consulting your best interest, while I devote one discourse to warn you all, and especially the young, against the fatal influence of the play-house, and endeavour to dissuade you from a place so dangerous to virtue and religion. Whatever the exhortation in the text particularly refers to, I think it is fairly applicable to the diversion which I would preserve you from. For almost all our plays are “profane and vain babblings,” and they “increase unto more ungodliness ;” that is, though they may appear rather trifling than mischievous, they will be in the issue greatly mischievous. They will, as the apostle adds, spread “like a gangrene ;” corrupt those who hear them, lead them to corrupt others, and so the mischief will become dreadfully extensive. Therefore they are to be shunned. Such babblings should not be uttered ; they should not be heard ; and no countenance is to be given to those who utter them. My design is, to show, by several weighty arguments, the bad effect of attending the play-house. These I hope will, by the divine blessing, have some influence upon your hearts ; and lead every one to shun it, who hath a tender conscience and a reverence for the authority and judgment of the great God. Let it then be considered that attending the play-house hath a tendency to corrupt the morals, to give the mind a light and vain turn, and unfit it for rational and pious exercises ; that it is a sinful waste both of time and money ; that they who frequent it do mischief to others by their countenance and example, and act contrary to the judgment and advice of the most wise and pious men in all ages. And let me observe, before I proceed, that several of these arguments are equally applicable to some other fashionable diversions. Consider,

I. *The play-house tends to corrupt the morals of those who attend it.*

Most of the sentiments, which are inculcated there, have this tendency. Vice is set off with every charm by which it can be adorned : and virtue, at least piety, often represented in a ridiculous light ; so as to prejudice young minds against it. It is well known that pride and revenge, unchristian resentment and false honour,—that duels and self-murder, make a considerable part of most of our plays, and are the conduct and passions often recommended in them. Love between the sexes, the strongest and most dangerous passion in the human frame, attended with intrigue, combating with parental authority, jealousy, rivals, and other opposition, make a part of almost every play ; and it is “described by play-writers, as if their aim was to raise a whirlwind, which was to sweep down reason, religion, decency, and to carry away before it every duty.”* Characters are often drawn, which are no where to be found ; persons and things represented in an extravagant, false light ; so that the mind contracts a romantic turn, the judgment is corrupted, and the conduct injured. When real characters are represented, they are often bad characters ; yet sometimes painted in an amiable light, and divested of what is shocking. The rake and debauchee is the favourite character, and often rewarded at the end of the play ; while the man of strict virtue and gravity is described as an hypocrite, or made an object of ridicule. In some of these compositions adultery and fornication are made light of, while marriage, God’s holy ordinance, is ridiculed, sobriety put out of countenance, and modesty laughed at. The language of most plays is as bad as their sentiments. They abound in profaneness, oaths curses, taking the name of God in vain, and making a jest of serious things. Many of the plays most commonly acted are full of indecent language, or of words and phrases of double meaning ; and things are often uttered in the theatre, which no modest persons would utter in company, or hear uttered by others, without reckoning themselves affronted. It abounds with “filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting,” which St. Paul saith, “are not once to be named among saints,” Eph. v. 3, 4, where many critics suppose he particularly refers to the stage. Now when this is the case, I think nothing can be plainer, than that it is a very dangerous place to the souls of men. Plays excite and strengthen those passions which it is the business of Christians to prevent and restrain ; they put their virtue to an unnecessary trial ; expose them to temptations to lewdness, pride, revenge, profane and filthy language, and every indecency. All these sentiments are enforced, and these passions heightened, by the action, scenery, music, and company. And the senses and the soul being thus assaulted at once, it is no wonder that such “evil communica-

* Richardson’s Pamela.

tions corrupt good manners." The truth of these remarks will further appear, if you consider that the writers and actors of plays have been, in general, the vilest of men. If plays were a virtuous, useful entertainment, as some pretend, the actors of them, who enter more into the parts than spectators, would undoubtedly be persons of sobriety, purity, economy, and a regular conversation, and would at least have some appearance of religion. But the contrary is notorious; and appears especially from the lives of some authors and many actors of plays, which have been written, even by their friends. And doth not this confirm the truth and justice of my argument; at least give sufficient cause of suspicion, that the play-house is a great corrupter of the morals of men? But, if it doth not make men openly vicious, yet,

II. *It gives the mind a light and vain turn, and unfits it for rational, pious exercises.*

And thus those "profane and vain babblings increase unto more ungodliness." A round of diversions of any kind, especially this, as certainly takes off all religious impressions, as sensuality itself. And indeed it is but a more refined sensuality, and makes men "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Every thing that lessens a deep and serious sense of religion, is exceeding dangerous. The theatre gives young minds a turn for romance and extravagance, and a habit of idleness and trifling; by which they are unfitted for the sober affairs of common life, and contract an aversion to every thing that is grave and pious. It fills company with trifling, unprofitable conversation. It gives the softer sex an air of boldness and confidence, very unbecoming the Christian or the gentlewoman. It unfits heads of families for domestic cares and business, by filling their minds with vain and grand ideas above their rank and station. It is most pernicious to the humility and subjection of servants; especially by raising in their minds romantic notions of love and intrigue, and thus they are easily seduced by the corrupt and the artful to lewdness and ruin. When the mind is once brought into this idle, trifling, romantic state, the transition to the practice of iniquity is easy and natural, as melancholy experience shows. But the grand evil of it, and which even the best minds are in danger of feeling, is that it unfits and indisposes the heart for the exercises of religion; for serious and devout meditation upon God and the great concerns of the soul and eternity. The busy scenes, in which a person hath been engaged at the play-house, will crowd in again upon the mind. The vain babblings which he hath heard will be uppermost, and his fancy be defiled by the licentious language which hath been made familiar to it. It can hardly be expected that he should come with any relish, or even seriousness, to read and

meditate upon the holy scriptures. Very different ideas, than they suggest, will engross his thoughts. If his conscience will not be easy without something like prayer, it can scarcely be a spiritual sacrifice, after the sensual, or at best trifling scenes, to which he hath been a witness. And I may appeal to the consciences of those who are most fond of this diversion, whether they ever found that it added seriousness to their spirits, fixedness of attention and warmth of affection to their devotional exercises; or whether they must not acknowledge, as many, who were once fond of it, have done, that it left behind an indisposition and disrelish for every thing that was grave, serious, devout, and heavenly. And if this be not a dreadful effect, I know not what is.

III. *It occasions a sinful waste of time and money.*

And this, though the recreation itself should be allowed to be innocent, will deserve the consideration of every Christian. Time is an inestimable jewel, and graciously given us, that we may prepare for a blessed eternity. And three or four hours of a day are quite too much to be spent in any amusement whatsoever; especially by those whose circumstances require motion, rather than rest, as a recreation; particularly by those who are most apt to complain of the length of religious services. The manner of spending his time is a concern of great moment to a serious Christian, and he “trembles for fear of God’s righteous judgments,” when he reads those awful words, “Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.” But this diversion is attended with another disadvantage also; that it breaks in upon family-order and regularity; the stated hours for family business, meals, and devotion, if there be any; and leaves room for much idleness, waste, and disorder at home. Nor is the money devoted to this purpose a light consideration. For however well particular persons may afford the expense, it leaves them so much less for pious and charitable uses. And money, as well as time, is a talent for which we are to be accountable to God. Unless it hath, in some way or other, been employed for his glory, we shall be condemned as unprofitable servants. It is to be feared, that they who are most fond of diversion are so far from being the most generous, that they are often unjust: they pursue their pleasures, while their debts are unpaid; or gratify their taste by fraud and oppression, or to the great injury of their families. I am to add further, that attending the play-house,

IV. *Is doing injury to others, by the countenance and example which it gives to them.*

This is particularly the case, when heads of families, when the sober and the virtuous, who make a profession of religion,

attend it. These may think and say, that they are sure they shall receive no harm. But (not to urge that this very confidence shows that they are in peculiar danger of being corrupted) I would observe, that by encouraging the players, they are "partakers of their sins," and contribute to the mischief which they do. It is generally allowed, that the very profession is mean and sordid. The actors personate so many characters, that they have none of their own; or none but what are contemptible. Persons of sense and true politeness shun the company of the generality of them, as much as fools and rakes court it. But their occupation is not only mean, but unchristian and mischievous. Therefore they who contribute to support them in it, countenance and encourage vice, though they themselves may not at present be injured. The example of those who frequent the play-house is likewise of bad influence. If you who do it can afford the expense of this amusement, others, who cannot, will follow, and will plead, your example. With what face can heads of families deny their children, or even their servants, liberty to go, when they go themselves; especially as the latter are fond of aping their superiors, and provision is made for their having the same entertainment at a cheaper rate. You may soon find, to your cost, that hereby your domestics will have their heads raised above their station, enjoy their pleasures at your expense, and punish you for the bad example you have set them, by their idleness, insolence, and extravagance. It is further to be considered, that the minds of many others of the lower ranks may be in more danger of being corrupted by this amusement than yours; yet having the sanction of your example, they will allow themselves in it. If you can make a shift to vindicate your own conduct, doth it not deserve to be considered, what injury it may do to them? You may, by some artful evasions, attend with little or no scruple: they may go with a doubting conscience, and so be seduced into sin and ruin. And will you put your pleasures in the balance with the interest of an immortal soul? St. Paul hath peremptorily determined against you in the strongest terms; "Take heed, lest by any means your liberty become a stumbling-block to the weak. For if any man see thee, who hast knowledge," and professest religion, "sitting in an idol's temple," or a play-house, "shall not his weak conscience be emboldened" to sit there too, and probably do worse? "So that when ye sin against your brethren and ensnare them, ye sin against Christ." And wilt thou be accessory to the destruction of thy brother for whom Christ died? 1 Cor. viii. 9, &c. Therefore it is our duty to abstain from such practices and diversions, which, though lawful and innocent in themselves, may be the occasion of leading others to sin against God, and so destroying their souls. I add, once more,

V. It is acting contrary to the judgment and advice of the most wise and pious men in all ages.

And I hope this thought will have some weight with all modest and thoughtful persons, especially the young. I might here urge, that no such diversion was ever known among the Jews, God's ancient people; that though it was allowed by some heathen states, the actors were reckoned infamous, and excluded from all honourable posts and services. Not one of them could, in the early ages of Christianity, be admitted into the church, without quitting this profession. All converts were required, at their baptism, to "renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world;" by which was meant principally the play-house. This language is still used in the form of baptism in the church of England; so that those who attend it do in effect renounce their baptismal engagements. I might mention many councils and canons, in the early ages of Christianity, by which this diversion was absolutely forbidden, as inconsistent with the character of a Christian, and destructive of a life of godliness. I would observe, that the most wise and pious divines of every denomination among us have censured it and dissuaded from it. And it is remarkable that those who have most freely censured it have had, from their situations and connexions, the best opportunities of knowing what mischief it produceth. I particularly refer to the archbishops Usher and Tillotson, Mr. Seed and many others of the established church; and Dr. Watts and Mr. Barker among the dissenters. Archbishop Tillotson in particular, candid and gentle as he was, calls the play-house, with great beauty and propriety, "the devil's chapel, and the school and nursery of lewdness and vice;" and speaking of parents who take their children there, he calls them "monsters," and adds, "I had almost said, devils." Now I think the opinion of so many judicious and holy men ought to have great weight, to lead you to suspect your own judgment or your own piety, if you are otherwise minded; and the rather, as that you will grieve pious ministers and fellow-Christians; which ought to have some weight with you. I may add, that actors' performing in most towns is a notorious violation of the laws of our country, however magistrates may connive at it. Therefore no one who fears God, honours the king, reverenceth the laws, or consulteth the public welfare, ought to give any countenance to such transgressors.

But as men are very expert at finding excuses for walking in the ways of their hearts and following the fashion, and prone to satisfy themselves with these which are weak and insufficient, let me consider the principal pleas which are offered for attending the play-house.

Many plead that it is a diversion. They say that God and religion allow recreation. This I readily acknowledge. But

consider, the end of diversion is, as the very word imports, to give the mind a little relaxation from important cares; to refresh the spirits and fit us for returning, with greater ability and relish, to the common business of life and to religion. Every recreation that doth not answer these ends, is an unlawful one. Now I think it cannot be reasonably said of the play-house, that it answers these ends. There is too much time spent there, for it to be an innocent diversion. If it deeply fixeth the attention and strongly interests the heart, it not only excites those passions which Christianity was designed to restrain, but actually becomes a fatigue. Besides, as I hinted above, exercise is the proper recreation of those whose business very much confines them at home, or to a sitting posture; and reading and conversation should be the recreation of others. Further, are there not other diversions to be found, less hazardous to virtue, less suspicious, more safe, innocent, and honourable, more becoming Christians? Can you say that you go to the play-house to glorify God? That you "do it heartily as to the Lord;" with good intentions, conscientious views, under a sense of God's presence, and with a desire to please him? In short, can you say that you go there to answer any good end, which may not be better and more safely attained another way? Can you seriously and solemnly ask the blessing of God on this diversion? If you cannot, it is far from being innocent; and any improvements which you may there be supposed to make in politeness and the knowledge of the world, will be a small equivalent for risking your virtue and the seriousness of your spirits.

You may perhaps plead, that many others attend it; that the generality do. But this is indeed the weakest of all arguments. God commands us "not to follow a multitude to do evil;" "not to be conformed to this world;" "not to walk as others walk in the vanity of their minds," but "to abstain from the appearance of evil." There are many things in which you must dare to be singular, and for which you must bear to be bantered, if you will be Christians and lay hold on eternal life. Yet custom, and fashion, and the fear of sneers, frighten our youth out of their principles and their souls; and they are ashamed of being thought singularly wise and good. If any persons laugh at you for sober and honourable singularity, look upon them as your enemies, keep out of their company, and even "scorn the scorers," Prov. iii. 34. But you may plead that many good people frequent the play-house. You would probably think me uncharitable if I were to dispute this assertion. But "good people" is a very loose term; and if instead of good, you will put that old-fashioned term "holy," or that used in the text, "godly," and will judge of men, not by the relaxed and fashionable morality of the present age, but by the word of God, it will

be found that few, if any, truly holy and godly men frequent it; or if they do, it is no part of their goodness. But this plea is still nothing to the purpose. The question is not, what others do, but what is right and lawful in itself; what is most consistent with and agreeable to a profession of godliness. By far the majority of good men decline going to the theatre, and strongly advise others against it. Whereas no openly vicious man declines going upon principle. In this case, examine not a particular character but the prevailing part. The worst men show in general a great fondness for this diversion; the most wise and pious an aversion to it. And is this a recommendation to you? Consider among your acquaintance, whether those who are most eager for it, or those who shun and disapprove it, appear to fear God and mind religion most; and with which of them would you choose to have your eternal lot and portion. Let me add, that since this plea is so often urged, all who make a credible profession of religion should be careful not to give occasion for it, and lead others into sin by their example. To plead that you must attend the play-house on account of your business and interest, and to oblige your customers and friends, is very trifling. The man who fears God, and reverences his own conscience, will first consider whether it be lawful and innocent in itself, or may not do mischief to himself, or to others, who may be ensnared by his example. He will trust Providence with his secular interest in the way of duty and safety, whomsoever he may be likely to disoblige by walking in it; he will never run the risk of losing his soul for the gain of the whole world. Besides, an upright, conscientious, consistent Christian will be esteemed for his steadiness, and lose nothing upon the whole by it.

Some plead that they never go but when good plays are acted. To this I answer, the number of good ones is exceedingly small. The best are very seldom acted, especially in the country. Some have been rejected, as too grave for the stage, or have soon lost their credit there. Even a good play, that is, an innocent one, is seldom acted, without the addition of some scandalous farce or indecent songs. For one or two, which may be called good, there are scores which have many hateful passages in them, that are not fit to be read or heard by any sober, modest persons. And indeed it cannot be otherwise. The question is not, what the theatre *may be made*, but what *it is*. A virtuous set of players (if that could be supposed), who only acted good plays, would starve. The audience will give law to the actors, and have the entertainment to their taste, and as the bulk of the audience are persons of no principles, they must and will have bad plays to suit their taste. A late writer, who allows that "the form of the drama is the best calculated, of all species of writing, to convey and enforce the noblest sentiments both of

the head and heart," saith of the present age, "From the teeth outward the stage may be more chaste than formerly, but in fact we fear it is equally, if not more licentious. Though the taste of the people may not be that of verbal licentiousness, more actual vice may lurk under the dress of decency, than dares to appear under the gross garb of ribaldry. It is for this reason, however, more fatally seductive."* There are undoubtedly some noble and moral sentiments in a few compositions of this kind; but they have none equal to the purity of the Christian character; and some of the best have sentiments in them quite inconsistent with it.† But if a person will go when good plays are acted, he will scarcely know where to stop; and the arguments of wasting time and money, encouraging vice and doing mischief to others, still remain in their full force. If the theatre be a school of virtue, as some have asserted, who I believe know little what virtue is, it is surprising that the most holy men in every age should have condemned it, and that the scriptures should never recommend it in this view. If it be a dangerous amusement in general, no pretence of receiving instruction by it will warrant a concurrence in it. So that when these arguments are weighed, and the vanity of these pleas duly considered, I think this diversion must be pronounced unlawful; and that every Christian, who values the favour of God, the purity and peace of his own conscience, and the honour of his profession, will abstain from it, however fashionable it may be, and how strongly soever he may be solicited or inclined to attend it. But if persons will give themselves no trouble to consider whether it be lawful and proper or not, but will run with the crowd, I must leave them to "the judgment of God, which is according to truth." Upon the whole, I think it will appear from what hath been said, that there is at least room to hesitate about this amusement, and to doubt the lawfulness of it. Now if any of you are brought to this state of mind, then for you to attend upon it is unlawful. For thus St. Paul hath expressly determined, "He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin," Rom. xiv. 23; that is, it is a wicked thing for a person to do that which he doubteth the lawfulness of. He will be condemned of God as a sinner, if he ventures out of complaisance, false shame, or any other principle, to do what he knows or even suspects that God hath forbidden. There perhaps may be a few unhappy persons, who can honestly say, "We disapprove such dangerous amusements, and would gladly abstain from them; but we are under subjection to husbands, parents, or masters, and by their commands are sometimes obliged to attend them." These persons are much to be

* London Review, vol. i. p. 419.

† I do not except Addison's "Cato," of which, it is well known, Budgell and others made so bad a use.

pitied ; and if reasons, soft remonstrances, and humble entreaties, will not prevail upon their unreasonable and tyrannical superiors to excuse them, let them guard their hearts with the utmost diligence and fervent prayer. Let them labour while in the courts of vanity to keep their thoughts intent upon God and divine things. Then it may be hoped that they will, like the three Jewish youths, who would not worship the golden image, continue unhurt in the fiery trial, and praise their God in the midst of the flame.

Allow me to ask those who attend this diversion, Do you think a dying-bed will be made easy and comfortable by the remembrance of your attachment to it ? Will it afford you any satisfaction then, that you have taken what you now call innocent liberties ? Or rather, will it not give you (as I know it hath given some others) much pain and terror, when you are entering on the eternal world ? A lady, travelling in a stage-coach with the Rev. Mr. James Hervey, was largely expatiating on the play-house, as superior to all other entertainments. Among other things she observed, that “ there was the pleasure of thinking on the play before she went, the pleasure of attending it, and the pleasure of reflecting upon it after her return.” Mr. Hervey told her there was one pleasure she had not mentioned. The lady inquiring eagerly what that was, he answered, “ Madam, the pleasure it will give you on your death-bed.” The lady was so much struck with this well-timed hint, that she forsook the play-house, and set herself to pursue and enjoy those pleasures which would afford her comfortable reflections on her death-bed. Indulge me while I ask once more, whether you think that the pleas with which you now make a shift, or endeavour to satisfy your minds, will bear you out at the tribunal of the great God ? Will he admit them as sufficient ? Dare you venture your present comforts and everlasting salvation upon them ? You had need be very clear, where so much depends. It is good to be sure, where your eternal interest is at stake. Forbearance is certainly safest. And we cannot be too safe, where sin and duty, heaven and hell, are concerned. “ Happy is the man that feareth always ; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.”

But I know, by painful observation and experience, how little arguments and remonstrances of this kind are regarded, especially by persons of the higher ranks, when the fashion of the age, and the place where they live, and their own inclinations, draw the other way. And yet, my brethren, so great is my regard for your best interests, that methinks I would not have you go even to the play-house, without learning something good and useful there. Let me, therefore, recommend it to you, who, after all, choose to attend it, that before the play begins or between the acts, you dwell a little upon such reflections as

these: you are acting a part on the great stage of life; a part assigned you by the infinite, eternal Jehovah, your creator, governor, benefactor, and judge; that he sits behind the scenes; and though you see him not, he sees you, and observes and records all your actions, words, and thoughts; that he is too wise a being to be deceived, and too holy and awful a being to be trifled with. That you may, in a moment, even while you are seeing the play, be called off the stage of life to appear before your judge. That you must give an account to him of all things done in the body; of your time and money, your thoughts and imaginations, of the principles on which you have acted in life, of the encouragement and countenance which you have given to religion or to vice, and the good or injury which you have done to the souls of others by your converse and example. If it shall then appear that you have acted your part well, and kept yourselves pure, you will receive the applause of your judge; all his saints and angels will concur in it, and you will be for ever happy. But if you have acted your part ill, he will most certainly and awfully condemn you, and you will have your portion "with the devil and his angels in everlasting fire," Matt. xxv. 41. These most weighty sentiments and reflections you *may* learn at the play-house. And if you once learn and feel them, which I heartily pray that you may, my end will be answered; for I am persuaded, you will never go again.*

DISCOURSE XXXVI.

CHRISTIANS EXHORTED TO CONSIDER WHAT ANSWER THEIR MINISTERS WILL HAVE TO RETURN TO GOD CONCERNING THEM.

2 SAMUEL XXIV. 13.

Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.

THE duties of our several relations in life are much neglected, or very imperfectly performed, for want of duly attending to the nature and extent of them, and the various obligations we are under to the faithful discharge of them. When so much is said in scripture concerning the duty of ministers, and the flocks committed to them, to one another, it must be of great importance that it be seriously regarded, as it would contribute to their mutual affection, comfort, and edification. It is there-

* If the reader is desirous of further evidence of the danger arising from the play-house, I refer him to Collier's "Essay on the Stage," Dr. Charles Owen's "Essay on the Conduct of the Stage," especially Dr. Witherspoon's "Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage."

fore proper for Christian ministers sometimes to remind their hearers of the relation in which they stand to each other, and in a public manner to remind themselves of it, in order that they may be excited to "fulfil the ministry which they have received of the Lord," and be ashamed in any instances to act inconsistent with what they publicly profess to be their duty. It is, indeed, difficult for a minister to discourse on these topics, without putting on some unbecoming airs, or, at least, being charged with vanity by those who measure others by themselves. It is nevertheless proper and needful that this should be done; and it may be done with a good grace and with hope of success, when a minister's general conduct is such, that if it be esteemed "folly," his people will bear with it, as knowing that (according to St. Paul's apology for himself in this case), he is "jealous over them with a godly jealousy, that he may present them as a chaste virgin to Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 2. "Bear with my folly," then, my brethren, while I address you in the words of the text. Jehovah the God of Israel, being displeased with the sin of David in numbering the people, sent him a message by Gad the prophet, who was called "David's seer;" being often employed by the Lord to reveal his mind to that prince, and who afterwards wrote his history. Gad commands him in God's name to choose, whether, as a punishment for this sin, he would suffer three years' famine, or three months' flight before his enemies, or three days' pestilence. Gad, having delivered this message, adds in the text, "Now advise," or consider seriously, "and see, what answer I shall return to him that sent me." These words may naturally be accommodated to the case of Christian ministers, and will suggest these three remarks, which I propose to illustrate and improve.

I. Christian ministers are the messengers of God, and sent on an important errand.

II. They have an answer to return to him that sends them.

III. It becometh those, to whom their message is delivered, seriously to consider and see what answer their ministers will have to return concerning them.

I. Christian ministers are the messengers of God, and sent on an important errand.

Each of these thoughts deserves a little illustration. They are sent of God. Gad and the other prophets had an extraordinary commission from heaven. Immediate discoveries of the mind and will of God were made to them: and they were sometimes furnished with miraculous powers to prove that they had a divine commission. On the same account our Lord Jesus Christ is called God's "servant" and "messenger," Mal. iii. 1. He is often said to be "sent" by the Father, and is styled "the apostle"

or messenger "of our profession," Heb. iii. 1. In like manner those of his disciples whom he chose to be his stated attendants, and the witnesses of his resurrection, and to publish his gospel to the world, and whom he endowed with extraordinary gifts to qualify them for this service, are called "apostles," or, as the word signifies, messengers or persons sent. To denote the dignity of their office they are called "ambassadors for Christ," 2 Cor. v. 20. Though Christian ministers now must not pretend to such an extraordinary commission, and such high dignity, yet they may justly be considered as those who are sent of God. Thus the common priests among the Israelites were called, by the prophet Malachi, the messengers of the Lord of Hosts, Mal. ii. 7; though they had no extraordinary commission, but were only to explain and enforce the law of God, and perform the services which it required. So Christian ministers are in the New Testament called the angels, or messengers, of the churches. As Christ hath given pastors and teachers, and appointed that there should be a succession of them in his church, to the end of time; as he inclineth men to undertake this office, qualifyeth them for it, and in the course of his providence determines where they shall labour, they may justly be said to be sent by him, and may be styled, as they are in the New Testament, his "stewards," "ministers," "servants," and "messengers." Let us observe, further:—They are sent on an important errand. God is too wise a being to send any messengers on a trifling errand. The business of ministers is to instruct and save souls. So great is the patience and goodness of God, that they are not sent, like the prophet in the text, with nothing but terror and vengeance in their mouths, to declare the irreversible sentence of God against sinners; and only to propose to them, with which of his sore judgments they will be visited. But they are sent to warn men in general of the wrath to come; to show sinners their guilt and misery; to propose terms of accommodation, and, "in Christ's stead, to beseech men to be reconciled to God." They are sent to call them to repentance, and lead them to Jesus, as their only Saviour. As the messengers of God, they are to produce scripture warrant for every thing they enjoin, and enforce every precept by the divine authority, "Thus saith the Lord." Their message is to be often repeated; every sabbath, and on every other suitable occasion. They are to teach, not only publicly, but from house to house; that they may know the characters of men, hear their sentiments and pleas, and accommodate their addresses accordingly. In short, they are to watch for their souls, and conduct them in the way to heaven. And what errand can be more important, benevolent, and friendly than this? Let me observe,

II. *Ministers are to return an answer to him that sendeth them.*

They are to return to their Master, and give him an account of their message. They are to return to their Master. This they do, at least they ought to do it, every day; by going to his throne of grace, and there pouring out their hearts before him: either lamenting the obstinacy and disobedience of those among whom they labour, and praying for them; and returning him thanks for every instance of assistance, encouragement, and success. So we find that the prophets and apostles acted; and faithful ministers in every age have followed their pattern. But they return to their Master, in the most proper sense, when they die and go into his immediate presence. "The prophets do not live for ever." When they have ended their testimony, and finished their course of service, their souls return unto him who gave them; to their Master and Lord, whose stewards and servants they were. And they are to give him an account of their message. So the apostle saith of them, "They watch for your souls, as they that must give account," Heb. xiii. 17. They are to answer, as to their own fidelity, and the reception and success they have met with. They are to give an account of their own fidelity; whether they "took heed to themselves and their doctrine," studied the word of God carefully, delivered their message faithfully and plainly, and "declared the whole counsel of God;" whether they pursued their ministry with right ends and gave themselves wholly to it; whether they sought theirs, or them, to whom they ministered; their substance or their souls; and were careful to adorn their ministry and be examples to the flock. They are likewise to return an answer concerning the reception which they themselves met with: whether they were received as the messengers of God, and "esteemed highly in love for their work's sake;" or whether they were injured, or despised, or the worst construction put upon their words and actions; without any allowances being made for the difficulty of their work, or the common infirmities of human nature. They are also to give an answer concerning the reception and success which their word and message met with; whether it was regularly and seriously attended, and, as far as they can judge, upon what principles; whether it hath been obeyed or slighted; what souls have been converted, edified, and comforted by their labours; and what continue foolish, disobedient, and enemies to good works. They are to give an account in what state they have left the churches over which they presided; and what prospect there is with regard to the rising generation and the support of religion in the next age. It scarcely need to be hinted at, that our Master doth not want to be informed of these things. He knew what David would choose, before Gad returned his answer. There are good reasons why an earthly master, though he seeth what his servant hath done, should in many cases expect and demand an account of it from

him. God is pleased to represent his treatment of us in this light, both in the private judgment which every man goeth through at death, and in the general judgment of the great day. And the design of this is, more powerfully to impress our minds with the solemnity and vast importance of the future account. Thus are Christian ministers to return to their Master, and give him an account of their own behaviour and discharge of their duty; and also of the reception and success of their message. Let us observe,

III. *It becometh the members of Christian churches seriously to consider what answers their ministers will have to return concerning them.*

It is the duty of all Christians to consider this, with respect to every minister on whose labours they attend. But it is more especially their duty to consider it, with regard to their own pastors, whom they have chosen to preside over their sacred hours in the house of God, and labour among them in the Lord Jesus; or to those on whose ministrations they have thought it right to attend, without having personally chosen them into this relation. In either case they are to consider their ministers as being set over them by the providence of God, and sent unto them in his name. Each of you, brethren, is concerned in our ministry. We address, not to this or that particular person, any further than as our address is suited to his particular case; but to all who attend upon our ministry, concerning "the common salvation," in which all are interested. It is therefore the wisdom and duty of all, to examine themselves, and consider what regard they have paid to the messengers of God; whether they have treated them with candour, friendship, and love; or with severity, distance, and unkindness. Christians are to consider, how they have received the message which their ministers have brought in the name of the Lord. For instance, whether they have attended upon it; made conscience of regularly frequenting the house of God, and broke through difficulties and silenced excuses, that they might show their reverence for God and his ordinances. Whether they have esteemed "a day in God's courts better than a thousand," or said, "What a weariness is it! And when will the sabbath be gone?" They are to consider, whether they have heard the message with reverence and attention, and strove to keep their thoughts engaged; or whether they have indulged a drowsy, indolent frame, and taken little or no pains to "give the more earnest heed to the things which they have heard," Heb. ii. 1. Whether they have mixed faith with the word preached, and received the message as of divine authority, as far as it was agreeable to scripture. Whether, as the apostle expresseth it, they have "received it as the word of men, or, as it is in truth, the word of God," 1 Thess. ii. 13.

It is their wisdom to inquire, whether they have gone to the house of God to have their curiosity gratified, their minds entertained, and to pass away an hour or two, which they could not decently employ in any other way or place ; or whether they have gone with a sincere intention and desire to join devoutly in supplication and thanksgivings, to know what is the will of God, and to hear their duty enforced, and with a resolution that all, which the Lord God said to them, they would do, and be obedient. They are to consider, whether they have endeavoured to apply the word closely to their consciences, to examine their own state by it, and amend their lives according to it ; or whether they think they have done enough, when they have given a bodily attendance on divine worship. The chief inquiry which they are to make is, what effect the message of God hath had upon their souls ; whether they have been enlightened, sanctified, and edified by the gospel ; whether they have obeyed it from the heart ; or still go on in their trespasses, and reject the gracious offers which divine grace hath so frequently and affectionately made to them. Let every Christian think with himself, What answer will *my* minister have to return to his Master concerning *me* ? What report doth he bring of me to the throne of grace *now*, in his devout addresses ? Is it a mournful or a joyful one ? If he removeth to the unseen world before me, what account will he have to give of me there ? Must he say that I have been his comfort, or his grief ? That I have been an honour or a reproach to the church over which he presided ? Have I done what I ought, by a regular attendance on public worship ; by a respectful behaviour to him ; by religious discourse ; by family prayer and instruction, and active endeavours for the welfare of the church ; have I done any thing by these methods to strengthen his hands, to encourage him in his work, to make his life comfortable and his labours pleasant and useful ? Or have I, on the other hand, by my own misconduct, by doing that against which he warned me, and neglecting that to which he hath exhorted and urged me, weakened his hands, grieved his heart, and increased those infirmities which are hurrying him to the silent grave ? Thus it becometh the members of Christian churches seriously to inquire and consider, what answer their ministers will have to return to their Master concerning them ; as they are messengers of the Lord of hosts sent on an important errand ; as they are to return an answer to him, how they have delivered his message ; and with what attention, regard, and obedience it hath been received. Having thus illustrated the particulars suggested by the text, I proceed to show how they are to be improved by us.

APPLICATION.

1. *This subject affords some useful instruction to Christian ministers* ; and I desire seriously to attend to it and carefully to receive it. It should lead them to “magnify their office,” as the messengers of God ; and to be thankful that they are honoured with a commission from him, and a commission of the greatest importance to mankind. It should excite their warmest gratitude that they are employed under Christ, on the same errand which brought him into the world : that they are employed in the service of those souls for whom he shed his precious blood ; which sheweth how valuable they are in the divine estimation, and how important the message of ministers is. They ought, therefore, with St. Paul, to “thank Christ Jesus the Lord, who hath put them into the ministry.” Further, they may learn to deliver their message with all plainness, seriousness, and fidelity ; teaching men to observe what Christ commandeth them, neither exceeding it nor coming short of it. They are to “preach the word ; to be instant in season and out of season ; to rebuke, exhort, and entreat with all long-suffering ; to warn every man and teach every man ; that they may present them perfect in Christ,” and give a joyful answer concerning them. Ministers should often consider what answer they will have to return to their Master ; that it may make them diligent to know the state of their flocks ; that it may direct them to suitable studies, addresses, and prayers, and may animate their message with that seriousness and fervour which becomes its vast importance. They know that it depends partly on their diligence, and partly on their people’s care, and on both, under a divine blessing, whether their answer shall be comfortable or not. And they should encourage themselves with this thought, that though they cannot give a good account of some committed to their care, yet their account of themselves will be honourable, joyful, and happy, if they have faithfully discharged their duty ; and that their “judgment is with the Lord,” and their “work” and reward “with their God,” Isa. xlix. 4. I add,

2. *Christian people may derive some useful instruction from these particulars.* Learn then, my brethren, in the first place, to be thankful that messengers are sent to you on so kind and gracious an errand. Bless God, that when Christ, after his ascension, was showering down gifts on his church, he gave “pastors and teachers” for the edification of it, Eph. iv. 11. A standing ministry in the church is a standing token of the goodness and tender mercy of God. Praise him that they are not sent, like the prophet Gad to David, with no words but those of terror and vengeance. They bring you, in their Master’s name, friendly warnings, kind invitations, earnest entreaties, to accept the grace of the gospel, and be happy for ever. “How beautiful are their feet, who bring such glad tidings ; who publish peace,” and sal-

vation in the name of the most High ! Further, let it be your serious inquiry, what answer your ministers will have to return concerning you. Their message, though very kind, is very peremptory, and requires an immediate and determinate answer. Will you be holy and obedient, or not ? Will you choose the favour or the wrath of God ; heaven or hell ? Let each ask himself then, How have I behaved to the messengers of God ? What regard have I shown to their message ? What pains have I taken to hear it ; to consider it ; to preach it over again to my own heart ? After what hath been said above concerning this inquiry, I need not branch it into more particulars. If a prince or great man, much your superior, sent a servant to you with a message, would you not be careful so to receive the message and comply with it, and so to behave to the servant, that he might return with a favourable account of you to his master ? In order to excite you thus to advise, consider, and inquire, let me observe, that this will assist you to judge of your true character, and the state of your souls. It is difficult to bring men to close inquiry and self-examination, and to fix their thoughts to a work which, however important and necessary, is to most persons very disagreeable. Perhaps placing the subject of inquiry in this new and uncommon light may dispose you very carefully to make it. Seriously thinking and considering what answer your ministers will have to return concerning you, may assist you to form a true and faithful judgment of your state towards God. Consider further, God will certainly call you to an account. Your ministers are not to answer for you ; nor is it by their sentence that you are to stand or fall, to be acquitted or condemned. " Every one of us must give an account of himself to God." Your ministers may be mistaken in your character, as they are always disposed to judge most favourably of you. For instance, they may take civility to the servant for love to the Master, and a reverent behaviour in the house of God for real devotion. They cannot judge hearts. But God cannot be deceived, and he will " bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil." Further, the inquiry, which I am recommending, will have a good influence upon your future behaviour. It may tend to regulate your general conduct, as Christians. It may lead you to correct the errors of which you are conscious ; to improve in those graces in which you are defective ; " to be holy in all manner of conversation, and to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." It may particularly regulate your conduct towards your ministers, which, allow me to say, will have an important influence and effect upon your whole lives. You will be concerned to remove and avoid every thing which is or may be a grief or discouragement to them ; and to be " doers of the word, and not hearers only," disappointing them and " deceiving your own souls." You will

be solicitous to exert yourselves to support religion and strengthen their hands, that they may have comfort in you; that their thanksgivings on your account may be daily presented to the throne of grace; and that you may be "their joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus."

POSTSCRIPT.

LET the candid reader indulge me, if, at the conclusion of this discourse, I add what was addressed, and particularly suited to, the congregation under my pastoral care, as it may be further serviceable to them whose best interest I am under many obligations still to consult, and as I can no other way address to them.

ALLOW me, my dear friends, to apply these reflections more particularly to you on my own account. Many of you remember that train of providential events which brought me among you; by uniting two Christian congregations in one place and with one heart, which had been, for near a century, distinct; God having removed, in one month, their respective pastors. These and some other events, at that time, were so remarkable and striking, that perhaps no minister ever had greater reason to conclude from such appearances, that he was sent of God to the place where he laboured. Serving you in your best interests hath been the business, the pleasure, and joy of my life; and I would not have exchanged the employment for any wealth, honour, or preferment. But I cannot expect to continue long among you. My growing infirmities daily remind me, that I must soon return to my Master, or have finished my services among you before my life. Having now laboured among you about twenty-four years, I must be very thoughtless and stupid, or very impious, if I have not had many serious thoughts, what answer I shall return concerning you; and, allow me to say, it is your duty likewise seriously to consider it. What pains I have taken to serve you in all your interests, especially your best interests, amidst daily weakness and languor for many years past, my Master knoweth; though I must at last, with deep penitence and humility, cast myself upon his infinite mercy. If you are not sensible of this, it is in vain, and might appear arrogant, for me to say any thing about it. I wish I had been able to have done much more for the interest of my Employer and the good of your souls. What effect hath been produced by my labours you are to inquire. Blessed be God, his house is not forsaken, nor his table deserted; and we have encouraging prospect with regard to many of the rising generation. But you are to inquire, "advise and see," each for himself. Have I increased in wisdom, grown more

serious and devout, more holy and heavenly, more sober and regular, more generous and charitable, and ready to every good word and work? The result of my own most attentive and serious inquiry I must faithfully lay before you, with a cheerful hope that it will, by the divine blessing, produce some good effect upon you. With regard to some of you, alas! my answer to him that sent me must be, They are still obstinate and impenitent. They profane thy sabbath, and drink to excess. There is no worship in their families. There are quarrels and differences between them. I can perceive no signs of spiritual life, but they appear dead in sin. Some young persons, whom I have both publicly and privately instructed, week after week, for many years, and followed with a paternal solicitude and affection, are yet companions of fools, thoughtless, and extravagant, and show no evidences of real religion. Though there is not one vice, against which I have not warned this flock, nor one branch of a religious and honourable character, to which I have not exhorted them; yet, with regard to some, I must say, "Lord, I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought. I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people." Yet I hope, through thy grace, to be a sweet savour unto thee in them that perish. But oh, let thy mercy yet be exerted to pluck them as brands out of the burning; and let those who have been my grief be the glory and joy of my successor! With regard to others of you, after the most attentive observation and inquiry, I know not what answer I can return. I would willingly hope that there is "some good thing in them towards the Lord God of Israel." But they are careless in their attendance upon the divine message, seem to come with indifference to receive it, totally or generally absent themselves from the Lord's table, take little or no care to promote religion in their families. They can spy a mote in a brother's eye, but see not the beam that is in their own. They seem to be afraid of being too religious. They trifle away part of the sabbath; sometimes frequent bad company; and allow themselves in some mean and dishonourable methods of trade and gain; as if they were unwilling that any should thrive but themselves. My fears concerning them prevail above my hopes. With regard to these, my answer to him that sent me must be, Lord, they seem to me to have no more than the form of godliness; but thou, who knowest their hearts; knowest whether they have the power of it. And I must leave them to thine impartial tribunal and unerring judgment. I humbly trust that I can call thee for a record upon my soul, that I am pure from their blood, 2 Cor. i. 23; Acts xx. 26. With regard to very many of you, blessed be God, my answer to him who honoured me with his message is as easy as it comfortable. Lord, they have treated me with esteem,

love, and tenderness; and received my message with attention, gratitude, and obedience. They keep holy thy sabbath, and are punctual and serious in their attendance on all thy ordinances. Their families are regular, orderly, and houses of God. Thy fear appears to govern them in all their business and connexions. Their love to Jesus appears in their love to his institutions, obedience to his commands, concern to promote his interest, and love to their brethren; and they have a good report of all men. Not a few of the rising generation appear to have valued and improved the instructions they have received; and I have the joy to see them walking in truth. And oh, what thanks can I render to God, for his distinguishing grace to me, in making me any way instrumental to produce such effects as these; and in giving me "all the joy, wherewith I rejoice for your sakes before my God?" "Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved," Phil. iv. 1. Amen.

DISCOURSES TO THE AGED

ON SEVERAL

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

“ Though I might be much bold in Christ, to enjoin thee that which is convenient : yet, for love’s sake, I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged ; and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.”—PHILEM. 8, 9.

P R E F A C E.

A LEARNED physician, Dr. Smith (in his "Portrait of Old Age," p. 257,) expresseth his earnest desire that physicians would study the *gerocomical* part of physic, or what relates to the health and ease of old persons, more than they do. "Indeed," saith he, "no part wants our help so much as this. For, among all the verbose Grecians, there is not one complete tract upon this subject. There are few to be found among all other writers; and those miserable and barren. The improvement that may be made in this part of physic would be as useful to mankind, as any one discovery of nature hitherto made." The like may in some degree be said of attempts to promote the religious improvement and comfort of aged persons. There are some celebrated pieces of the heathen philosophers on the subject of old age. Some Germans have written upon it; but very few of our divines. Steele's "Treatise on Old Age" is very useful, and was much esteemed and read in the last century, but is now become scarce, and almost forgotten. The tracts of Davies and Peers, though serious and useful, chiefly centre in one point, and that not sufficiently peculiar, viz. preparation for death and eternity. It seems natural that persons should read, with special attention and regard, what is particularly addressed to them, and suited to their age and circumstances. It is, no doubt, on this principle, that many volumes of sermons to young persons have been published within the last forty years: and, of late, particular addresses have been made from the press, to the poor and the great, and to young persons of each sex, which have been well received, and, I am persuaded, have done much good. But I have not seen nor heard of any sermons immediately addressed to the aged, yet surely they highly deserve esteem, compassion, and assistance: and they may expect, among other acts of respect and kindness, to have such advices, encouragements, and consolations addressed to them, as may, by the blessing of God, contribute to make their old age honourable, comfortable, and useful, and smooth the last scenes of their lives. This is attempted in the following discourses. I am far from pretending to equal the composures of my honoured fathers and brethren, who have addressed to the young. But much accuracy, sprightliness, and elegance do not seem necessary in addressing the aged. What is abstruse, criti-

cal, and difficult, is here avoided, as it appeared improper and absurd to trouble persons, who are in the decline of life, with such things : and I have long observed, that they are best pleased with what is plain, simple, and affectionate.

These sermons were delivered in the course of my stated ministry; and most of them on the last Lord's days of successive years; it being my custom, on those days, to address more immediately to my aged friends, to whom those addresses were very acceptable, and, I hope, beneficial. I was more disposed to employ some time in preparing them for the press; as providence hath rendered me incapable of being useful in other ways; and as I am myself declining into the vale of years, and, by long continued daily infirmities, got very far into it. From much experience, therefore, I know how to pity the aged under their infirmities and decays, and desire to be their humble monitor and comforter.

I hope the subjects of these discourses will be thought suitable to the circumstances of the generality of the aged; and that other infirm and afflicted persons, though not old, may find some things in this volume, which may assist them to bear and improve their afflictions, as becometh Christians. The affinity there is between some of the subjects, occasioned the same thoughts to be repeated, which could not be avoided without injustice to the subjects and the readers. On the other hand, some important thoughts are omitted or only hinted at, in places where it might be expected they should have been introduced, or largely discussed; because they are inserted and enlarged upon in some other discourse.

I shall esteem it a singular honour, and the ground of fervent thankfulness to God, if he is pleased to make these discourses subservient to the holiness and consolation of my aged brethren and other companions in the tribulation and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ. To them they are very respectfully dedicated: and I entreat their earnest prayers, that I may daily manifest the graces which I recommend to their cultivation; that I may finish my course with joy, and meet them in that world of everlasting health and vigour, glory and felicity, for which all our afflictions and decays, all our religious privileges and the means of grace, are designed to prepare us. Amen.

J. O.

DISCOURSE I.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ACTIVITY OF YOUTH AND THE INFIRMITIES OF AGE.

JOHN XXI. 18.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.

OUR blessed Lord, just before his ascension to heaven, had eaten with his apostles, and inquired particularly of Peter three times whether he loved him. Peter having appealed to him for the sincerity of his love, Christ commands him to show that love by feeding his sheep and lambs, taking care of the interest of his church and people, even the weakest of them. He then foretells that this apostle should die a violent death, and follow his Master to the cross; and he makes a comparison between the strength, agility, and liberty he possessed and exercised, when he was young, and what he should feel and suffer when he was an old man. Though the words principally refer to the manner in which Peter should suffer, and (as the evangelist in the next verse interprets it) "by what death he should glorify God;" yet the comparison being founded on the difference there is between youth and age, they may naturally be applied to the circumstances of all in the advance of life. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not." Let me consider,

I. The view here given us of the strength and activity of youth;

II. Of the weakness and infirmities of age; and direct you to the proper improvement of each. As I am at this time particularly to address the aged, I shall but touch upon the former; though whatever contributes to the wisdom and piety of youth, contributes to the comfort of age. Let me consider,

I. *The view here given of the strength and activity of youth.*

"When thou wast young," saith Christ to Peter, "thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst." "The glory of young men," saith Solomon, "is their strength."* They are strong and fit for action; perform any business they

* Prov. xx. 29.

undertake with ease. They are seldom afraid of dangers, or discouraged by difficulties. They gird themselves, to prepare for labouring and travelling; they need little help, and will soon despatch what is within the compass of their ability. They walk whither they will with ease and agility, without any pain or stiffness in their limbs. Their joints are strong and pliable; their sinews and muscles firm, and their nerves braced. When they are tired they sleep sound, and soon recover their strength. They are so capable of motion and action, and have such a natural inclination to it, that inactivity is generally a penance to them, and there is scarce any thing they dislike more than confinement. I cannot dismiss this head without making two reflections from it.

1. How absurd is it for youth to be indolent and inactive! Providence hath given them strength, and intends that they should use it. By a moderate exertion of it in business or motion, it increaseth. Yet there are too many instances of young persons who are unnaturally indolent. They love sleep and inactivity, and thereby weaken their strength, and stupify their faculties. If they go from home they saunter along, as if their limbs would not carry them. When they have engaged in business they doze over it, and seem to go on heavily in every thing. This is a very unhappy disposition. Inactivity is bad for their health: it is a hinderance to their progress in business, and their profit by it. They seldom overcome this evil habit in future life, and thereby often come to poverty. Besides, this indolent temper layeth them open to many temptations; particularly to bad company, to neglect the means of grace and all those branches of religion which require labour and self-denial. This unhappy disposition in youth is often owing to the foolish indulgence of their parents, especially if their constitutions are not vigorous. It appears therefore a matter of great importance, that parents should teach, and even oblige, their children to be diligent and active; to go about their business, and even their play, with resolution, courage, and despatch; in a word, to do as much for themselves, and have as little help from others as possible. Let us reflect,

2. How reasonable and desirable it is for young persons to employ their strength and activity in God's service! Though you are young, yet you are rational creatures, and the subjects and servants of God; and therefore should devote your strength to the service and honour of him who gave it. It is pity it should all be employed in pursuing the world, or serving divers lusts and pleasures; that you should give your strength to sin, and your ways to that which destroyeth souls. How sad is it, that you should pursue your pleasures with vigour and spirit, and yet have no life in religion! That you should readily walk to every assembly but "the solemn assembly;" and dance or sport till midnight or after it, and yet say of God's service,

“What a weariness it is ! And when will the sabbath be gone ?” That you should spend hour after hour at a card-table, and yet be tired in hearing or reading a sermon. Whereas, according to St. John’s words, “because ye are strong, the word of God ought to abide in you, and ye ought to overcome the wicked one.”* Let God then, my young friends, have the prime of your days, the vigour of your strength, and the warmth of your affections. He claims and he deserves these ; and if you are not active in his service, as you are in your business and pleasures, it is a sign that you want wisdom, and you are laying a foundation for sorrow and remorse. For the words of the text may be applied to an old sinner, “When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest ; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” You will be bound in the fetters of iniquity, and carried into captivity. The powers of your souls will be enfeebled ; and you will have lost that degree of strength which you now have to break your bonds asunder. You may attempt it again and again, but in vain. Consider therefore now, that age will quickly come, and weaken your strength in the way, the strength both of body and mind, if sickness doth not do it before. Therefore Solomon exhorts, “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”† But this leads me to consider,

II. *The view given us in the text of the weakness and infirmities of age.*

When men grow old, they “stretch forth their hands” for help ; want others to guide and assist them ; and they have, in general, an unwillingness to die. Instead of walking “where they would,” as they did when they were young, they are confined to a narrow sphere ; move slowly and with difficulty, through the weakness of their sight, the shortness of their breath, or the decay of their strength. “Fear is in the way,” and they are soon tired. “The keepers of the house,” the hands and arms, “tremble ; and the strong men,” the legs and thighs, “bow themselves.” Their feet, that carried them many pleasant walks and visits, now move with difficulty and pain. Their hands, that used to work, grow so weak, that they can scarce dress or feed themselves ; and the back, that used to support the building, bends and stoops under the burden of years. They are not able to help others or defend themselves. They are glad of a staff to rest upon, or some friendly hand to support their tottering steps. Even “their strength is labour and sorrow.” “The grasshopper is a burden, and appetite fails ;”

* 1 John ii. 14.

† Eccles. xii. 1.

and, through various infirmities, "the clouds return after the rain." And yet it is often found that they are unwilling to die, though they have not, like Peter, the prospect of a violent death before them. To be carried to the grave is to be carried "whither they would not;" and some of them, "through fear of death, are all their life-time subject to bondage." But this is so plain, that it needs no further illustration. The great thing is, to attend to the proper improvement to be made of it, which will be in the following

REFLECTIONS.

1. *Let us adore the wisdom of God in this difference between the young and the aged.* In the present state of the world this difference may be called natural, though the infirmities of age may rather be considered as unnatural, being the consequence of man's apostasy from God. Nevertheless, the wisdom of Providence is apparent in this difference. One is sometimes ready to wish that the aged, who have most wisdom and experience, had most strength; but while we have old heads to contrive and advise, and young hands to work, it comes much to the same. Besides, had the aged the strength of youth, they would be more ready to despise the young, than they now are. The young have opportunities of improving by the experience of the aged, of cultivating and showing compassion and benevolence to them, and requiting the tender care they manifested to them in their helpless infancy. The sight of the aged and their various infirmities, tends to engage young people to make a prudent preparation for age, by diligence, frugality, a friendly obliging temper, and especially by a close application to serious religion. God hath, in this respect, distributed his gifts variously. As in the natural body, "the eye cannot say to the hand, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you;" so neither can the aged say to the young, nor the young to the aged, We have no need of you. Their infirmities are likewise a standing token of the evil of sin, and hint to themselves and all about them, what a "bitter thing" it is to revolt from God. They are also wisely appointed to wean their affections from the world. If God did not take them off from it by pains and weakness, they would scarce know when to leave it. But he lays them by from business and amusements, that they may have more time for reading, meditation, and prayer, and to set their souls in order for their speedy remove to eternity. From the infirmities of the aged, we

2. *Learn the wisdom of making a prudent provision for old age.* When our Lord commands us to "take no thought for the morrow," he means only to restrain anxiety, and inordinate, excessive care; not a prudent forecast. It is the duty of young persons to apply themselves to some business and calling; to be diligent in it; to be frugal and saving; that they may make

provision for a family; be raised above the temptations of poverty; enjoy the pleasures of beneficence, and have a comfortable subsistence, if they should live to be old and infirm. An apocryphal writer saith, "If thou hast gathered nothing in thy youth, how canst thou find any thing in thine age?"* It is therefore very criminal in them, especially in servants, to be wasteful and extravagant; to purchase unnecessary things, because they please their fancy and make them like their superiors; and to spend all they get in dress and vanity. They seldom think what they shall do in sickness and old age. For want of that thought, they often prove heavy burdens to their friends, or to the public, which might have been prevented by frugality.† A state of dependence is a miserable state to any, especially to those who have lived in plenty; and when men have brought themselves into straits by their extravagance, they must expect to be often reminded of it, nor will they be assisted with cheerfulness. It is therefore the wisdom of young persons to be diligent, cautious, and frugal; content with plain dress and accommodations, that they lay up in store for futurity. In this respect, as Solomon observes, "the prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself," that is, makes provision against it; "but the simple pass on, without thought and consideration, and so are punished."‡ Are the infirmities of age so many? then,

3. *It is the duty of all to help and comfort the aged; especially of their own descendants.* Nothing can be meaner or viler than to use them ill; to impose upon their blindness, deafness, and decay of memory, or to despise them on account of their infirmities. It is, on the contrary, our duty to do what we can for their support, assistance, and comfort, and behave to them with reverence, and respect. Their very age entitles them to this; especially when their "hoary heads are crowns of glory, being found in the way of righteousness." Their former activity and usefulness should be remembered to their honour. This also is the command of God, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man. I am the Lord."§ St. Peter likewise exhorts, "Ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder." But the children and grand-children of aged persons are under peculiar and indispensable obligations to help and comfort them. They are commanded "to show (pity or) kindness at home and to requite their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God."|| This they are to do, by maintaining them, if necessary; by consulting their ease and honour; by

* Ecclus. xxv. 3.

† I am credibly informed, that a person, who had lately a large sum of money left to him to distribute in charity, had application made to him for a share of it from no less than thirty persons who had rode in their own coaches. How pertinent is the caution given above in the present age!

‡ Prov. xxii. 5.

§ Lev. xix. 32.

|| 1 Tim. v. 4.

hearkening to their advices ; and more especially maintaining a conversation becoming the gospel, that their hearts may rejoice, and that they may have the respect, gratitude, and pity of their descendants, to balance their griefs and lighten their infirmities.* From the consideration of these, we may infer,

4. *It is the wisdom and interest of those, who are advancing in life, to secure what friends they can.* Aged persons want help and assistance, and sometimes for years together. Their children may be taken away by death, removed to a distance, or prove ungrateful and disobedient. Those whose duty it is to assist them may be incapable or unwilling to do it ; and it is often seen, that “ there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” I would therefore recommend it to the aged to avoid every thing that would disgust and drive away their friends ; particularly a positive, supercilious, overbearing temper ; a fretful, uneasy, discontented spirit ; always complaining of slights and neglects ; and thus making the lives of all about them uncomfortable. Be not continually finding fault with your youngers, for they are the persons who must help you ; few of your contemporaries can. And it must be a very extraordinary degree, either of pity or good nature, that will incline persons no way bound by relation, to help those who are always cross and perverse. If you drive away those that can help you, and would do it with pleasure if you were meek, obliging, and thankful, you may stretch out your hands in vain, and thank yourselves for it, if the world appears desirous to be rid of you. “ A man that hath friends,” or would have them, “ must show himself friendly.”

5. *Let the aged labour to be patient, cheerful, and thankful under their infirmities.* Consider, my friends, that every age hath its burdens and infirmities, its services and its joys ; that no strange thing happens to you, nothing but what is common to men in the decline of life. What are you better than your fathers ? than blind Isaac, decrepit David, and aged Peter ; all the favourites of heaven ? Consider also, that there are many circumstances to lighten your burdens, and reconcile your minds to your pains and infirmities. For instance, it is an honour to be old. Accordingly Eli was thus threatened, that “ there should not be an old man in his house.” How many thousands have you survived, who set out in life with you, and many of them seemed likely to have survived you ! “ Length of days” is, I hope, a reward of your piety, and your grey head is your beauty and crown of glory. Remember the vigour, strength, and pleasure of your youth ; and when wearisome days and nights are appointed to you, think how many easy and happy ones you have en-

* “ My son, help thy father in his age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth ; and if his understanding fail, have patience with him and despise him not, when thou art in thy full strength. For in the day of thine affliction it shall be remembered.” Eccles. iii. 12, 13, &c.

joyed, how many years of health, comfort, and usefulness you have been blessed with. And having received so much good at the hand of the Lord, undeserved and forfeited good, will you be impatient and unthankful if you receive some evil? You have perhaps the satisfaction to see your children and children's children, which, as Solomon observes, are "the crown of old men,"* and to be witnesses of their wisdom, piety, and usefulness. You have likewise this advantage, that the most dangerous appetites and passions of the human frame are weakened by age, and the fuel of vice almost destroyed. "It is" (as a heathen expresseth it) "a singular privilege of old age, that it delivers men from that which was most pernicious to youth."† It is well that all your comforts have not left you together; and it will be your wisdom fairly to estimate your comforts and your crosses. Let not your infirmities make you forget, or be unthankful for, any degrees of health and ease that are continued to you, any help and kindness you receive from your relations and friends. Remember particularly, if you are sincere Christians, that "your salvation is nearer than when you believed;" and, if you have been active and zealous in Christ's service, your reflections are comfortable, and your hopes of glory lively. And this, surely, is sufficient to balance all your sorrows. I conclude this head in the words of a heathen philosopher; "A quiet honest old age is to be preferred to any other age; and he that complains of it is unworthy to possess it."

6. *Let the aged endeavour to be as useful as they can, even to the last.* This is indeed the duty of every man, in every period of his life: but I would now particularly urge it upon the aged, for these two reasons: they have some peculiar advantages for doing good, and yet are prone to make their infirmities an excuse for sloth and to say, their work is done, before their capacity and strength are quite gone. I exhort you to gird yourselves, and walk as well as you can; giving as little trouble to those about you as possible. This will be much for your own health and age, and for the comfort of your relatives and friends. It is the duty of those who are advancing in life, to resist the encroachments of age; and the nearer approach it makes, the more diligence they should use in repelling it. They should (as one expresseth it) "guard against it as a distemper;" consulting their health, using moderate exercise, and such diet, both for kind and quantity, as may refresh nature without loading it. They should also diligently employ the faculties of the mind, and especially labour to keep the memory clear and sound by habitual exercise. For by remissness and sloth, the powers both of body

* Prov. xvii. 6.

† "Age smooths our path in prudence, sweeps aside
The snares keen appetite and passion spread
To catch stray fools: and woe to that grey head,
Whose folly would undo what age hath done!"—YOUNG.

and mind decay. As your consciences will charge you with much mispent time, endeavour to make the best improvement of what remaineth. Still attend regularly on the house and worship of God; for no one is too old to learn, or too good not to need to be quickened. It is an instance of the wisdom of providence, that while old people often lose their sight and hearing, and are incapable of walking about, they have still the power of speech: a plain intimation, that God intends you should use it wisely, and for his glory. If you have a good treasure in your hearts, and are rich in Christian experience, communicate it freely for the benefit of others. "Days should speak, and the multitude of years teach wisdom."* Let your "lips feed many," and be frequently dropping a word of exhortation to those who are young; not with the air and tone of a sour dictator, but with the tenderness of a parent, and the freedom of a friend. While you "open your mouths with wisdom," let "the law of kindness be upon your tongues."† Exhort them to remember their Creator, to trust in the Saviour's mighty name, to keep near God in secret devotion and public ordinances, and to cherish brotherly love. It is said of St. John, that when, through age and weakness, he was forced to be carried to the Christian assembly, and had only strength to utter a few words, he would often say, "Little children, love one another." Solomon exhorteth to such a conduct as this, when he saith, "In the morning of life sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, this or that; or whether they both shall be alike good."‡ Endeavour to be useful likewise by praying for the world and the church: especially for the rising generation. Lay up a stock of prayers for posterity, when your walking and working days are over. Let your patience, contentment, and cheerfulness, show to all about you, that you have not learned the religion of Jesus, nor made so long a profession of it in vain. Thus will your "last works" be, on some accounts, "better than your first;" and Christ, when he cometh, shall find you so doing. This was the use which St. Peter made of our Lord's prophecy in the text; "I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord

* Job. xxxii. 7.

† ——— "Though old, he still retained
His manly sense, and energy of mind,
Virtuous and wise he was, but not severe;
He still remembered that he once was young;
His easy presence checked no decent joy.
Him even the dissolute admired; for he
A graceful freedom when he pleased put on,
And laughing could instruct."

Armstrong on Health, b. iv. l. 224, &c.

‡ Eccles. xi. 6.

Jesus Christ hath showed me.”* Think me not assuming, fathers, in these exhortations; for thus saith Paul to Titus, “Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine; that the aged be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, and in patience; that they behave as becometh holiness, and be teachers of good things.”†

7. *Let the aged endeavour to reconcile their hearts to the approach of death.* Peter, though old, though he had seen Christ’s transfiguration, and could appeal to him for the sincerity of his love, yet was dismayed at the approach of a violent death. Hezekiah, though he could appeal to God, that he had walked before him in truth and with an upright heart, “wept sore,” when the prophet told him he should die and not live. The fear of death is a natural passion, and if it were not an evil, it would never have been made the object of a threatening. Even most of the aged and infirm would live a little longer. But it is desirable for your own comfort and the honour of religion, that you should be willing to die on the best principles, not so much to get rid of your pains and infirmities, as to see your Lord, and obtain the salvation of your souls. In order to this, quit all earthly cares, as much as possible, and do not grasp the world, as too many do, with a dying hand, as if it were their God and their all. Endeavour to wean your affections from all things here below; to have your conversation in heaven; and to meditate more closely on the glory to be revealed. Think how little was to be done for God, and how little of him to be enjoyed, even in your best days. Endeavour, by a life of faith, meekness, patience, and heavenly-mindedness, to contract a greater suitability to, and meetness for, the heavenly life, on which you hope, through grace, you are just entering; that “as the outward man decays, the inward man may be renewed day by day;” that when you stand at the entrance of the valley of the shadow of death, you may fear no evil, but may say, with a pious minister in those circumstances, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; I am ready.” I can only add,

8. *Let aged Christians rejoice in the views of the heavenly world:* for there shall be none of the infirmities of age, nor any other infirmity or imperfection. When you “groan” in these earthly tabernacles, “being burdened,” direct your thoughts to the time, and it is near, when you shall “be clothed upon with an heavenly house, and mortality shall be swallowed up of life.” Look, further, to the rising day, when “the creature shall be entirely delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Then, “what is sown in weakness shall be raised in power;” needing no recruits of food nor sleep, and subject to no pain, disease, nor weariness. The

* 2 Pet. i. 13, 14.

† Titus ii. 1—3.

eyes, which have seen the Lord Jesus in his glory, shall weep and be dim no more. The head, which he hath graciously adorned with a crown of righteousness, shall ache no more. The hands, which have laid hold on eternal life, shall tremble no more : but the holy soul will possess everlasting youth, strength, and vigour ; and all will be employed in the praises and services of God and the Lamb. I conclude with expressing my earnest wishes and prayers for you, my aged brethren, that your burdens may be light and easy, your tempers patient, calm, and cheerful, your lives honourable and useful to the last ; that at length your end may be peace, and you may have an abundant entrance into that world, where “ there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying ; neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are all passed away.”

DISCOURSE II.

BARZILLAI'S REFUSAL OF DAVID'S INVITATION TO JERUSALEM
CONSIDERED.

2 SAMUEL XIX. 34.

And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem ?

THESE words are part of Barzillai's modest and serious reply to a very kind and generous offer, which king David made him. This venerable old gentleman had, with remarkable loyalty and benevolence, furnished David and his attendants with provision and other accommodations, when he fled from his capital city, on occasion of the rebellion of his son Absalom.* When the rebellion was quelled, and David was returning home, Barzillai came to congratulate him on the occasion, and attend him on part of the way. The king invited him to come and spend the remainder of his days at Jerusalem, and eat at his table, and promised to repay to him and his family the kindness which he had received from him in the day of his distress. A charming proposal, had Barzillai loved the world and been fond of its honours. But this venerable and worthy man declines it. He makes a very handsome reply, of which our text is the beginning ; “ How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem ? I am this day fourscore years old.” It is past the time of life for me to be intent upon such things. I must not think of changing my habitation, when I must soon change worlds. I choose rather to live retired from the cares and pleasures of this world, that I may better reflect upon, and prepare for, the solemn time, when I must remove from it, which time is near at hand.

* Chap. xviii. 27—29.

The text naturally suggests these two remarks, which I shall endeavour to illustrate and improve, with a particular view to the instruction of the aged.

I. A serious consideration of approaching death is peculiarly proper for aged persons.

II. The prospect of a speedy removal out of this world should wean their affections from it.

I. A serious consideration of approaching death is peculiarly proper for aged persons.

Barzillai, in his reply to David, seems to have the near approach of death chiefly in his view. So he adds, v. 37, "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother." And surely such a view was exceedingly proper and becoming for a person of his age, though he seemed possessed of much strength and vigour. To illustrate this remark, let me observe in general, that it is fit, and will be very beneficial, for us all to consider our latter end. It is to be wished that all men were so wise as to dwell upon the contemplation of death, and make the solemn scenes and awful consequences of it familiar to their minds; and that for this evident reason, that it is absolutely certain and unavoidable. Barzillai knew, and all men know, that a royal palace, however strong and well guarded, cannot keep out the king of terrors; that no titles, honours, pleasures, or emoluments, no wisdom nor piety, can screen from its fatal stroke. Innumerable are the diseases and accidents to which our bodies are liable; and any one of them may cut asunder the thread of life, when it seems likely to be spun out for many years. How common soever these thoughts may be, and the facts which lead to them, nothing can be of greater importance than seriously to consider them: since after death there is the judgment, when every man must receive his doom according to the things done in the body. But some circumstances make it peculiarly proper that the aged should make these thoughts familiar and habitual to them. For instance,

1. The speedy period of their lives is more certain than that of others. There is a probability that they who are in the prime or morning of their days may continue many years; but there is no probability that the aged should. They who are arrived to seventy years, which is called the age of man, know that they must shortly put off the body; and they who, like Barzillai, are got ten years beyond it, are sure of a very speedy dismissal. Their lease is just expired; it is time, high time, for them daily to expect an ejection, and to consider what an abode and state they shall be removed to, when turned out of these houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust. This leads me to add,

2. The infirmities which are peculiar to, or most frequent in

old age, make the consideration of death highly proper. "The days of our years," saith Moses, "are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they are fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we flee away."* A vigorous hearty old man is a very uncommon sight. The old are subject to many and various pains and infirmities; and each of these is a warning, and tells them, they are not to stay long here. The chinks which time hath made in their earthly tabernacle remind them that its downfall is near; that the next storm, the next disease, may overthrow it; or if it escapes a violent attack, it will soon fall of itself. Then, as Solomon beautifully expresseth it, "the clouds return after the rain,"† one infirmity succeeds another, and their intervals of ease and comfort are short. Then "the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves;" the arms that defended the body tremble, the thighs and legs that supported it totter and bend under the weight. "Those that look out at the windows are darkened;" the eyes fail, and give the man notice that they must soon be sealed up in darkness. Now these sensible decays of nature daily warn them to be serious and thoughtful about their journey to their long home.

3. The remembrance of the many relations, friends, and acquaintance whom they have survived, should excite this disposition in them. When aged persons visit the places where they have spent their youth, and think of those who set out in life with them, they will find very few of them left. How common is it to hear them saying, that they have buried all their old friends and acquaintance and survived, not only their brothers, sisters, and yoke-fellows, but even some of their children, and perhaps grand-children too. They will tell you of whole families that are sunk and gone in their remembrance; and that the street or town where they live, hath changed almost every inhabitant. Those few of their own standing which remain, are dropping off apace. Surely such common reflections as these should lead them to think of their own removal.‡ Your fathers, your acquaintance and neighbours, where are they? They are gone into eternity, and their places here know them no more. It is proper and natural for you daily to think of following them, and making room for another generation. When you mention or think of the changes

* Psalm xc. 10.

† Eccles. xii. 3, &c.

‡ When in this vale of years I backward look,
And miss such numbers, numbers too of such
Firmer in health, and greener in their age,
And stricter on their guard, and fitter far
To play life's subtle game, I scarce believe
Still survive: and am I fond of life,
Who scarce can think it possible I live?
I scarce can meet a monument, but holds
My younger: every date cries, "Come away."

YOUNG.

made in your family and neighbourhood, think of your own hastening change, and put Barzillai's question to your own consciences, "How long have I to live?" How suitable is that petition of Moses for us all, and for the aged especially, after he had been contemplating the shortness of life and the weakness of old age, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom."* This naturally leads our thoughts to the second remark in our text :

II. *The prospect of a speedy removal out of this world, should wean our affections from it.*

"How long have I to live," saith the pious gentleman in the text, "that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem;" that I should enter on a new scene, immerse myself in the cares, and indulge myself in the pleasures of life? I must so quickly depart, that it will be my wisdom to keep myself from being entangled in these things and ensnared by them. May this be the wisdom of all the aged! "All that is in the world," saith the apostle, "is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life;" the pleasures, honours, and riches of this world. The prospect of death led Barzillai to decline each of these when offered to him; as appears by the following verses. To illustrate this remark, I would observe, that the prospect of death should make aged persons dead to the honours and pleasures of this world, and it should be their desire and endeavour, as far as they lawfully can, to get free from its cares.

1. The prospect of death should make the aged dead to the honours and pleasures of this world. "I am this day," saith Barzillai, "eighty years old. Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink?" What will all the dainties of the court be to me, now my appetite and relish for them is gone? "Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?" Music hath lost its charms to me, and the most sprightly airs and melodious harmony will only grate in my ears, now the daughters of music are brought low, now my ear is dull, and my voice broken and trembling. What he here suggests, namely, that his relish for pleasure was gone, is generally the case of the aged, and therefore an evidence that they should not be fond of it. It is plainly the will of God, that at this time of life such amusements and diversions should be cheerfully resigned; yea, setting aside all religious considerations, common prudence warns them, as one expresseth it, "to tie up the wheel, as they are going down the hill of life." It is good to make a virtue of necessity, and be dead to the delights of sense, when they are in a great measure dead to you. To indulge your appetites and desires in such a manner as would be natural and innocent in younger persons, is generally putting a force upon nature, coun-

* Psalm xc. 12.

teracting the designs of Providence, and exposing yourselves to general contempt.* To see aged persons scrambling for the honours and preferments of this world, which they can enjoy but a little while, and the weight of which they are unable to bear with credit and comfort, must appear to all but themselves very absurd and shocking. Their relaxations and amusements should be all grave and manly. The honours and pleasures of this world should be left to the rising age. They may lawfully pursue and enjoy those that are innocent, provided it be with moderation, and a mind intent upon better things. Barzillai thought it improper for him to go to David's court; but, saith he to the king, "Let thy servant Chimham, my son, go over with my lord the king, and do to him what shall seem good unto thee," v. 37, from whence Mr. Henry well observes, "They who are old should not grudge young people those delights, which they themselves are past the enjoyment of, nor confine them to their retirements. Every thing is beautiful in its season." The aged should be dead to the honours and pleasures of this world, because if they are true Christians, they enjoy nobler pleasures, and have better honours in possession, and especially in prospect. You have pleasures infinitely nobler, arising from the contemplation of divine things; living by faith in Christ, and feeling the constraining influence of his love; from the testimony of your consciences, the witness and consolation of the Spirit; from conversing with God by meditation and prayer; and from good hope through grace. Earthly honours and pleasures are prone to enervate minds in their full vigour; much more those which are already weakened by age. You have the honour of being the children of God, the brethren of Christ, and joint heirs with him of the heavenly inheritance. Your minds therefore should be fixed upon divine and heavenly objects, and daily aiming to contract a greater relish and meetness for the pleasures of angels and glorified saints. Indeed the aged do not often fall into the error which I am cautioning you against, but as it is plainly suggested by Barzillai to be absurd and monstrous, and evidently appears to be so when it is observed, it was proper to be mentioned. I proceed to what concerns them more: namely,

2. The prospect of death should lead them to get free from the cares of the world, as far as they lawfully can. Barzillai would not go to Jerusalem because it would engage him in many unnecessary cares, in leaving the place where he was settled, and entering on a new sphere of action; and it is much to be wished that the aged would follow his example. I would

* Though grey our heads, our thoughts and aims are green:
Like damag'd clocks, whose hand and bell dissent,
Folly sings six, while nature points at twelve.

be far from encouraging even them in idleness. It is their duty to labour while they have ability, if their labours are necessary to provide for themselves or their families, and not to make themselves unnecessarily burdensome to their relations and friends. What I would caution them against, is being immersed in the cares of the world when it is unnecessary; when, though they may not, like Barzillai, be "very great" men, (v. 37), they have a competency to maintain them comfortably while they live; when they have children to take the burden off their hands, who would be glad to enter into their labours.* If, upon serious inquiry as in the sight of God, they judge it to be most for his honour and their own health and comfort that they should pursue their trade or business, it is their duty to bring it into as little compass as may be, to discharge themselves of those parts of it which will be attended with anxious and perplexing cares. Thus, "when Samuel was old, he made his sons judges over Israel."† The reasonableness of such a conduct in the aged appears from the thought suggested in the text, that they have but a short time to live. Let the following particulars, as founded on this thought, be carefully considered by them. Their capacity for business is generally weakened; they have more important concerns to mind; the more cares and business they have to attend to, the more their dying work will be disturbed, and the less fit will they be for heaven. Give me a patient hearing, fathers, while I illustrate these important particulars.

(1.) Their capacity for business is generally weakened.

This is Barzillai's reasoning in the verse after the text; "Can I discern between good and evil?" see what is proper to be done in various circumstances and difficulties which may occur? "Wherefore should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?" I am not fit for the active offices of a court; I can do the king little service, therefore I will not burden him and stand in the way of others. I shall need to be waited upon myself. It is time for me to live retired now my strength and faculties are impaired. This is usually the case of the aged. Their limbs, once strong and active, tremble and flag. Their memory is decayed, so that they cannot contrive and execute schemes as formerly. They often manage their business awkwardly and unsuccessfully; are easily imposed

* Not that I would advise the aged to give up their whole substance to their children, and become dependent upon them. I esteem the advice of an ancient Jewish writer to be very prudent and salutary: "Give not thy son and wife, thy brother and friend, power over thee whilst thou livest, and give not thy goods to another, lest it repent thee, and thou entreat for the same again. For better is it thy children should seek to thee, than that thou shouldest stand to their courtesy," Ecclus. xxxiii. 19—21. Yet, what upon an impartial judgment the aged can spare, should be given to their children for their assistance and encouragement.

† 1 Sam. viii. 1.

upon, and their associates would conduct it better without them. They have seldom firmness enough to bear the disappointments and vexations which attend business. Little losses sink and perplex them; especially as they have no prospect of living to see them retrieved. These are plain intimations of Providence that they should lessen their earthly cares. And, indeed, the aged ought, like Barzillai, to be the first to perceive themselves on the decline, and to retire before the world is tired of them. Again,

(2.) If their capacities continue ever so good, they have more important concerns to mind, and but a little time for them. The one thing needful, the great business relating to their souls and eternity, is sufficient to engage all the time which they can spare from that needful rest which old age requires. Your employment should be to examine your state, improve your graces, gird up your loins, trim your lamps, and brighten your evidences, for your Lord is at hand. Religion should have the chief place in your affections, desires, and pursuits; and every interval of health and ease should be improved in getting more ready for heaven. "See then," as St. Paul exhorts, "that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Again,

(3.) The more cares you have upon your hands the more will your dying thoughts be disturbed, and your last work be interrupted. So important are dying moments, and so awful the consequences of a departure out of this world, that it is extremely desirable to have nothing then to do but to die. To have perplexed affairs to settle, long accounts to adjust, a will to make, how grievous must this be to a serious person on the brink of eternity! Yet if these are not done, many and deplorable dissensions may be entailed upon a family. On these accounts, "whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might." Methinks every funeral you see or hear of, every pain and infirmity you feel, saith to you, as Isaiah to Hezekiah, "Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live."* Labour, then, by forethought and immediate despatch, to do so; that, in these solemn moments, there may be nothing of this kind to perplex and discompose the thoughts; nothing to engage them but what is of a religious and heavenly nature, that all may be calm within, and your soul at full leisure to renew the exercises of repentance, faith, love, and praise; and to receive communications of peace, hope, and joy, from the Holy Spirit. Once more, consider,

(4.) By various worldly cares the soul will be less disposed and qualified for the heavenly world. The immoderate love of the world is utterly inconsistent with the love of the Father;

* Isa. xxxviii. 1.

and such a love of it as may be regular and allowable in the prime or middle of life, may be immoderate and unjustifiable in old age. For it is both unnecessary, and takes up that time and thought which should be better employed. It should be your concern, fathers, to contract stronger habits of spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, by conversing more with the unseen world. I do not say you should live like recluses, and shut yourselves up from all commerce with the world; but lessen your business and cares as much as you prudently can, that your souls may be better disposed for spiritual employments and entertainments, and that heaven may be more welcome to you. The more worldly concerns you have to manage and settle, the more will your hearts be set on these things. You will be more unwilling to leave the world, and will enter into heaven with less transport and thankfulness, than if you had acted the wise part which Barzillai did.* Having thus illustrated the particulars suggested in the text, I shall conclude the discourse with a serious address to those in younger life and to the aged.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let me address myself to those who are in the morning or middle of life.* The considerations and cautions which I have been urging are applicable to you, though not equally with your fathers. You are to pursue the business of life, you may enjoy its pleasures, but each under proper restrictions and limitations, because you may have but a little time to live. You ought to pursue the business of life; diligently to employ yourselves in some honest calling. This is a duty you owe to God, to yourselves, to your families and the public. Follow your business as closely as you will, if it doth not thrust out religion, entrench upon the duties of your closet, drive out, or break in upon, family worship and order, or detain you from the house of God; if it doth not ruffle your temper, injure your health, or destroy domestic peace and happiness. In any of these cases it is sinful. It is highly commendable in you to make provision for futurity, to increase your substance, and

* "Prima vitæ tempora et media patriæ, extrema nobis, impertire debemus; ut ipsæ leges monent, quæ majorem annis sexaginta otio reddunt," Plin. Epis. lib. iv. ep. 23. In some modern communities, particularly Switzerland, their statutes discharge a senator from his office at sixty-five years of age. "It is a common, and, indeed, a commendable custom among the Spaniards, when persons are aged, to make a voluntary resignation of their offices, be they never so great and profitable; and sequestering and weaning themselves, as it were, from all worldly negotiations and encumbrances, to spend the residue of their days in meditation and devotion, and prepare themselves for another world. Thus the emperor Charles V. acted." Howell's Letters, 1, § 3, ep. 11. The celebrated Sir Matthew Hale resolved to have his declining days reserved to himself, that, being freed from all worldly cares, he might better spend them in pious contemplations and other devout exercises, and a due provision for eternity. He therefore resigned his office and retired into the country. Judge Hale's Life by Bishop Burnet, pp. 57—59.

leave your family even more than a competency, if you acknowledge God in all your ways, and mind religion as the great concern in human life. Reason and scripture allow you to taste the pleasures and recreations of life, if they do not interfere with your religion or your business; if your recreations are innocent, manly, seasonable, and relieve the mind amidst its cares. Let your amusements subserve your health and comfort, and make you more fit for your duty, both to God and man. To engage you to pursue your business and enjoy recreations under such regulations as these, consider how little time you have to live. You are young; at least vigorous and healthy; but are you not also frail and mortal? When you are plunging yourselves into many cares, and anxiously and immoderately pursuing your earthly schemes, ask yourselves the question in the text, "How long have I to live," that I should do so? that I should be so fond of the world, so eager to gain it, so fearful of losing it, so tenacious and covetous of it, and act as if it was my only hope and portion? Thus be careful not to "abuse" the world, for its "fashion passeth away." Ask this question also with regard to your recreations; "How long have I to live," that I should spend hour after hour at a card-table, or any other childish, sedentary, unprofitable diversion; that I should consume my precious, precarious moments, in vain and trifling company? "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will certainly, and may speedily, bring thee into judgment."* Thus make the views of death familiar to your minds; for, next to the influences of God's Spirit upon your hearts, nothing will be so likely to make your lawful business prosperous and comfortable; your amusements innocent, decent, and useful; and your tempers habitually serious and holy. Such a disposition will be of unspeakable benefit, if you are early removed out of life. If you live to be old the habits of piety will be confirmed, and the world, with its cares and pleasures, more easily and cheerfully resigned. Finally, attend to the exhortation of Christ; "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts are overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares."†

2. *Let me add a brief exhortation to the aged, founded on the subject we have been considering.* I speak unto you, fathers, because you cannot but know that the world is vain and death is near. Let me entreat you seriously to reflect, how absurd and shocking it is to see a person on the borders of the grave, greedy of money, sparing no time nor pains to increase his sub-

* Eccles. xi. 9.

† Luke xxi. 34.

stance. "Can any thing," saith a heathen, "be more absurd, than for a man to be eager in laying up travelling expenses when his journey is just ended?" How sad is it to see a poor dying creature, entering upon an awful eternity with a heart glued to the world and full of its concerns; who, instead of being crucified to the world, is, to the last, doating upon it! Shall I be allowed, in this connexion, to address you in the beautiful and striking language of Dr. Young?

O my co-evals! remnants of yourselves;
 Poor human ruins, tott'ring o'er the grave!
 Shall we, shall aged men, like aged trees,
 Strike deeper their vile root, and closer cling,
 Still more enamour'd of this wretched soil?
 Shall our pale wither'd hands be still stretch'd out,
 Trembling at once with eagerness and age?
 With avarice and convulsion grasping hard,
 Grasping at air? For what has earth besides?
 Man wants but little; nor that little long:
 How soon must he resign his very dust
 Which frugal nature lent him for an hour?*

How wise, pertinent, and affecting a caution! Labour not then to be rich; cease from your own wisdom; for if it terminates here, it will prove the greatest folly and madness. Let me entreat and persuade you to turn your thoughts and cares into a nobler channel; to "provide for yourselves bags that wax not old; a treasure in heaven that decayeth not;" and by being "rich in good works, ready to distribute, and willing to communicate, you may lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, and lay hold on eternal life." By meditation on the difference between things seen and unseen, by faith, prayer, and liberality, labour to get clear of worldly affections, and to grow "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Let your delight be in the word of God; in conversing with him; in the exercises of repentance and faith in Christ; and in resignation to the divine will. Employ some time also in instructing those that may come after you; represent to them the vanity of the world, your experience of the divine care and bounty, of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the influences of the Holy Spirit. Exhort and endeavour to engage them to choose the way of truth, and to walk as Christ walked. And let your own temper and example illustrate and enforce all your exhortations. That eminent statesman, Sir Francis Walsingham, in the decline of his days, wrote thus to his friend, Lord Burleigh: "We have lived long enough to our sovereign, to our country, and to our fortunes; it is high time we begin to live to ourselves and to our God."† Finally,

* Night Thoughts, No. 4

† Count Oxenstiern, chancellor of Sweden, and prime minister of the great Gustavus Adolphus, was a person of the first quality, rank, and abilities, in his own country, and had rendered himself very considerable through Europe, by the ministry of affairs at

if your time and strength be thus employed, you will find your hearts more and more loosened from the world; you will be eminent in holiness and useful to the last; and, as Eliphaz saith to Job, you "will come to your grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."* I shall only add, as he doth in the following verse, "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know ye it for your good."

DISCOURSE III.

THE FRUITFULNESS OF AGED CHRISTIANS CONSIDERED AND
URGED.

PSALM XII. 14.

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be fat and flourishing.

"I REMEMBER," saith God to Israel, "the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals." And this is true of all God's faithful servants, who entered into early and sincere engagements to be his, that he graciously remembers them. As an evidence of this, he hath made suitable provision for their continual progress in wisdom and piety, and to prevent their being weary in well-doing. The ordinances which he hath instituted, and the promises which he hath made in his word, are adapted to answer this important end. Our text is one of these precious promises made to old disciples; and, as appears from the foregoing verse, hath a reference to religious ordinances, and their great usefulness in promoting the fruitfulness of the saints. I desire the particular attention of you, my aged friends, to it; as it will at once suggest to you a most important duty, and a strong encouragement.

The Psalmist, by a beautiful allegory, or figure, represents the righteous as trees planted in the house of the Lord; and then adds, "They shall flourish in the courts of our God." But in one respect the comparison fails. Trees, when they are grown to their bulk and maturity, begin to decay; then they generally produce less fruit, and what they produce is less valuable than

home, and the greatest negociations in Europe. Being visited in his old age by the English ambassador, he said, "Sir, I have seen and enjoyed much of the world, but I never knew how to live till now. I thank my good God, who hath given me time to know him and myself. All the comfort I have, and can take (and which is more than the world can give me), is the knowledge of God's love in my heart, and the reading of this blessed book" (laying his hand on the bible). "You are now in the prime of your age and vigour, and in great favour and business, but these will all leave you, and you will, one day, better understand and relish what I say to you. Then you will find that there is more wisdom, truth, comfort, and pleasure, in retiring and turning your heart from the world, in the good Spirit of God, and in reading his sacred word, than in all the courts and all the favour of princes."

* Job v. 26.

in former years. But the righteous “shall *still* bring forth fruit in old age.” They shall grow like trees, but not decay like them. Nature indeed decays; but grace, in which their real, valuable growth consists, shall continue to thrive. “They shall be fat,” that is, strong and healthy: they shall be “flourishing,” or (as the word signifies) green in holiness, peace, and joy. For the illustration of these words I would observe, that they express both the duty and the privileges of aged saints. Let us consider each.

I. *The text expresseth the duty of the righteous:*

Namely, to bring forth fruit in old age. It will be proper to consider the fruits which may be expected from them, and then show, how reasonable it is that they should produce them.

1. Let us consider the fruits which may be expected from them. And these are, in general, the fruits of knowledge and holiness. “It may be reasonably expected that they should be fruitful in knowledge;” be wise and judicious Christians; not children in understanding, while they are old in years, but strong men in Christ; filled with all knowledge, especially of the scripture and divine things, and able to instruct and admonish others. They should be fruitful likewise “in holiness and every good work;” eminent and exemplary for the discharge of every Christian duty; remarkably devout and serious, just and charitable, humble and heavenly-minded. Thus St. Paul intimates, “that the aged men should be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, charity, in patience: the aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, or evil speakers, not addicted to slander and censoriousness, not given to much wine, but teachers of good things.” But let us dwell a little upon the proper fruits of age; the graces which are particularly necessary for aged Christians to abound in, and which are peculiarly ornamental and lovely at that season. One is, great patience, meekness, and quietness of spirit. This is most needful for them amidst their pains, infirmities, and natural decays. If they have accustomed themselves to the government of their passions and to self-denial, it will be easy and natural for them to manifest this amiable disposition. Their expectation of soon leaving this world and all its vexations, and putting off the body with all its infirmities, should promote and increase their resignation to the divine will, and their meekness and gentleness to all about them.* To be weaned from the world and ready for death, is another fruit of age. All, especially the aged, should consider themselves as “pilgrims and strangers on earth.” Their time is just ended; therefore they should not be anxious about or desirous of the riches and honours of this world. They should renounce its trifling pleasures, and be con-

* *Lenit albescens animos capillus.*—Hor.

tent and thankful, whatever their lot may be. Death and eternity should be much in their thoughts. They should be willing to leave a world, where they know so little of God, and can do him so little service, and where their converse with him and enjoyment of him is so broken, interrupted, and imperfect. Again, a heavenly conversation is a proper fruit of age. It becomes the old to think much of the end of their journey, and their everlasting home. It becomes the righteous to meditate frequently on the salvation to which they are approaching; to discourse with one another about their Father's house, its employments, and the happiness which he hath there provided for all his children. Thus should their affections be set on things above, and heaven be the general, delightful subject of their thoughts and converse. Once more, a deep concern for the honour of God, the support of religion, and the good of mankind, should be found in all aged Christians. Thus should they grow in usefulness; "showing God's strength to this generation, and his power to them that are to come." Their exhortations to others should be frequent and serious, as their words are weighty and impressive. Their prayers should be daily poured out for the piety and happiness of their families, of the church and the world; and they should breathe out their souls in fervent desires; that Christ and his cause may be glorified through the earth. They should, as far as they are able, extend their charity to the necessitous, particularly the aged poor, and especially contribute to support and promote the interest of religion. Let me now show,

2. How reasonable it is that such fruits should be found in them. It may be expected, from considering the nature of religion, as a vital principle, or the divine life in the soul. It is as natural for the spiritual life to grow, as it is for a living child, except the one and the other be diseased or neglected. If there be no progress in the ways of righteousness, no fruitfulness in old age, it is to be feared that there never was a real principle, no effectual work of grace, in the heart. If some have flourished for a season, and then decayed and become unfruitful, it is an evidence that they never have had a root in themselves. If any are good for nothing when they are old, there is reason to suspect they have been good for very little all their days. For true grace is growing: therefore the path of the just is compared to "the shining light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day;" and a religious principle, or a work of regeneration, is compared by our Lord to "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." Again, fruitfulness may be expected from aged Christians, through the natural force of habit and custom. Having been so long in Christ's school, we reasonably expect that they should have made a great progress in knowledge and religious skill; that they will be expert in the exercises of de-

votion; have a greater command of their passions and tongues, than younger persons; and not be, like them, tossed about with every wind of doctrine, or the sport of vanity and temptation. Having been trained up from their childhood in the way in which they should go, "when they are old they will not depart from it." They have had more acquaintance with, and longer experience of, the goodness of God, the suitableness and preciousness of Christ, the evil of sin, the emptiness of the world, and the pleasures of religion; and therefore their hearts will be more strongly influenced to judge and act accordingly. Further, they have, on some accounts, more advantages and fewer temptations than others. They generally have, or might have, less to do with the world than others; less commerce and converse with it, and fewer cares and anxieties about it. They have, by length of time, been undeceived in their expectations from it. Considering the short space before them, they have fewer temptations to oppression, injustice, fraud, envy, and discontent. Their bodily decays are a good preservative from the dangers which others are in, from fleshly lusts and sensible gratifications. They have less trouble from the appetites and desires of the body, more time to converse with God, with the bible, and their own hearts, than the young and the busy; and therefore they ought to be more steady and abundant in the service of God. To this we are to add, that they may expect peculiar assistances from the Spirit of God, in proportion to their many prayers and improvements. "To him that hath shall be given." As it may be presumed that they have highly valued, earnestly sought, and carefully cherished, the influences of the Spirit of grace, they may expect a more abundant communication of them, and that the effects thereof will appear in their continual fruitfulness. There is ample provision made in the covenant of grace, that God will carry on the divine life in them, by a supply of the Spirit of Jesus confirm them to the end; that "the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."* Thus we have seen, that it is the duty of aged Christians to be fruitful in knowledge and holiness, in patience, in heavenly-mindedness, and a zeal for the support of religion. We have also seen, whence it may reasonably be expected that they should be so; even from the nature of religion, as a living principle in the soul; from their being habituated to the exercises of it; from some peculiar advantages attending their circumstances; and, above all, from the influences of the Spirit. I observe,

II. *The text may be considered as expressing the privilege and happiness of the righteous:*

As a gracious promise made to them, that they "shall flourish

* Job xvii. 9.

in the courts of God, and be fruitful in old age;" that time, which impairs their strength and every thing else in the natural world, shall improve their graces, meliorate or refine their fruit. And this they are to expect from divine influences attending the means of grace. God will not forsake them, nor take away his Holy Spirit from them: he will perform the good work begun in them, till the day of Christ. His powerful grace shall be exerted to preserve them green and flourishing to the end. The faithfulness of God is engaged to do this. Therefore the Psalmist adds, in the verse following the text, "To show that the Lord is upright," or faithful to his promises. He then subjoins his own testimony to the truth of this; "He is my rock;" I have found him kind, powerful, and faithful in supporting the religious life in the soul, under all my difficulties and trials; and you will also find that "there is no unrighteousness in him." But it may be asked, Is this always the case? Do we not hear aged Christians, who appear to have been eminently holy and useful, sometimes lamenting and complaining of their leanness and unfruitfulness? And do we not see other aged persons, though they make no such complaints, evidently showing to all who know them, that they are almost fruitless and worthless? What shall we say to these things? "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" As to the first sort, who complain of their leanness, I would observe, that they sometimes mistake their own case and state. They find their affection to God and the Redeemer not so warm and lively as formerly; that there is more languor and distraction in their devotions; that they cannot so easily fix and command their thoughts, and are less affected with divine things than in time past. But all this may be owing to the decays of nature; their faculties may be weakened; their memories impaired: and it is well known that aged persons are less affected with objects of joy and sorrow than others. Their minds are less impressible than formerly. This is the natural consequence of age; and many middle aged, yea young persons, of a relaxed habit, weak nerves, and languid spirits, experience the same. But consider, my companions in this tribulation, that, though the fervour of the affections may be lessened, the judgment may be more settled, the will more determined for God and religion than heretofore, and we may with firmer purpose of heart cleave to him. Sin may be more mortified than ever it has been, and the soul gradually advancing towards maturity in grace and fitness for heaven. We may have a more calm and yet resolute zeal for Christ and his interest than ever. These are to be considered as marks of fruitfulness and evidences for glory, and when these are experienced, the decrease of spiritual warmth and affection should not discourage us. Aged Christians may also be led to these complaints, by mistaking what their present duty is. You are sometimes ready to blame and condemn yourselves

because you do so little to serve your God and your generation. But probably you are incapable of active services. Submission and patience seem to be the peculiar duties of your age and circumstances. Allow me to quote, in this connexion, that beautiful representation which Milton makes to this case, when he is lamenting his own blindness.

God doth not need
 Either man's works, or his own gifts. Who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
 Is kingly. Thousands, at his bidding, speed
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest.
 They also serve, who only stand and wait.*

But with regard to some aged persons, their unfruitfulness is their own fault. God doth his part, but they will not do theirs. They are too much engaged in, and devoted to, the world; wrapt up in their own secular interest, and will do nothing or little, for the good of their fellow-creatures. They have contracted a habit of complaining: are fretful and peevish to all connected with them, and will neither speak nor look cheerfully; whereas "the joy of the Lord is the strength" of the soul. They neglect to mortify the sins that easily beset them, and grow formal in religious duties. They take no pains to exercise their faculties, and therefore these decay; just as some lose their limbs for want of motion and exercise. On these accounts, instead of being fruitful in old age, they are like shrubs, or "the heath in the desert." But nothing contributes so much to their unfruitfulness, as their becoming indifferent to religious ordinances; thinking themselves too wise and too good to need any further improvement; or, if they attend them, taking no pains to impress the truths and motives of the gospel on their hearts, and to engage their souls in the exercises of prayer and praise. There is one error into which aged Christians are apt to fall, and which is of most pernicious influence; but I choose to express it in the words of the pious Dr. Owen; "They are ready to think and say, that the preaching and religious exercises, which they had in former days, were far to be preferred above what they now enjoy: and they despise the ministers of the present age in comparison with their fathers. But the change is in themselves. They have lost their spiritual appetite. Being grown full of themselves and conceited of their own abilities, they have not that taste and relish for the word which they had formerly: and this is both the cause, and the evidence, of the decay of all their other graces."† So that the fault is their own. They are not straitened in God, but in themselves. But with regard to many aged Christians, it must, in justice, be said, that their attendance upon ordinances is most regular, early, and serious, and

* Milton's Sonnets, No. 20.

† Owen's Meditation on the Glory of Christ, p. 60.

their respect to their ministers very honourable and encouraging : and it is much to be wished, that all the younger would imitate their example. Having thus considered the text as expressing both the duty and the privilege of aged saints, I proceed to make some improvement of the subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let aged Christians labour after greater fruitfulness.* If you are not sensible, fathers, that there is room for further improvement in grace, you have not yet learned the first instruction in Christ's religion ; to be poor in spirit, humble and lowly in heart. If you are not sensible, that you are in danger of decays and spiritual declensions ; that they will prove injurious, and may be destructive to your souls, you are but " children in understanding ;" yea, " know nothing as ye ought to know." But I hope and believe you are sensible of these things. Let me entreat you therefore to make it your great ambition to be fruitful, growing Christians : and in this let all your cares and thoughts centre. To that end, be often examining what fruit you produce, what ground you gain in the Christian race, and how the work of grace goeth on in your souls. Keep near to God by prayer, and watch in holy duties against that drowsiness and languor to which your infirmities expose you. Stir up yourselves to take hold on God ; as " from him all your fruit is found."* If you cannot address his throne with as much affection as formerly, do it at least with as much seriousness. Let your delight be in the law of the Lord, and meditate in it day and night. " Then you will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; and whose leaf shall not wither."† Think of the dying words of the aged and learned Salmasius ; " Oh ! I have lost a world of time : had I but one year longer, I would spend it in reading and meditation upon David's psalms and Paul's epistles." Remember also, that the promise in the text is made to those who " are planted in the house of the Lord." Continue your love to God's house and worship, and forsake not the good way, in which you have found so much edification and comfort. Live by faith in the all-sufficient Saviour, and abide in him to whom you are united, as the branches in the vine, and then you will bring forth much fruit. How dreadful will it be, if, after the kindness you have received from God, you give him reason to say of you, as he did of the Jews, " Thou hast been weary of me, O Israel."‡ To excite you to this holy ambition to be fruitful, growing Christians, consider that your own peace and comfort depend upon it. To find grace thriving while nature is decaying, will support you under your infirmities, and open a fountain of pleasure, when all other sources of it are

* Hos. xiv. 8.

† Psalm i. 3.

‡ Isa. xliii. 22.

dried up. It will remove your doubts, enliven your hopes, and brighten your prospects of glory. After the apostle Paul had described his persecutions and sufferings, he adds, "Nevertheless we faint not;" and the reason follows, "Though our outward man perisheth, yet the inward man is renewed," or gains fresh strength, "day by day."* If they who had an appearance of religion, and some zeal for it in their younger days, become cold, selfish, and indifferent, what comfort can they have? Nay indeed, as I hinted above, it seems a proof of a heart naturally barren and destitute of saving grace. Consider again, that your continual fruitfulness will be for the honour of God and your profession. It will show, as the Psalmist observes, that "he is your rock, and that there is no unrighteousness in him." "Herein is my Father glorified," saith Christ, "that ye bring forth much fruit." It reflects an honour upon his word and ordinances, and the influences of his Spirit, that they make the aged, with all their natural decays, spiritually strong and healthy, and vigorous in every grace. And finally, it will be an example and an encouragement to others. It may lead the young to think more favourably of religion, and to love the house of God. They will suspect the usefulness of the means of grace, if they see you declining. If you, who have long tried the ways of God, forsake them, or go on slowly or mournfully in them, what a discouragement, will this be to them! For their sake, and the sake of religion, do not put a stumbling-block before them. Let these motives engage you, "not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." See that the graces of the Christian character be in you and abound, that you may not be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; that you may adorn his doctrine, and hold fast your confidence to the end.

2. *They who would bring forth fruit in old age must begin betimes to do so.* My young friends, if you desire a holy, honourable, and happy old age, you must early cultivate your understandings, be engrafted into Christ by faith, and be joined to the Lord by a solemn self-dedication. You must now lay in a stock of useful knowledge; contract habits of piety, subjection, and self-government; and take the greatest pains to root out and subdue those passions and desires which are contrary to them. Religion is to be learned as a science, by thought and reading, practice and habit; and all under the influence of divine grace, which must be duly and earnestly sought. If you trifle away your youth, it is to be feared you will trifle away your age too. While you despise or pity old triflers, remember that it was the idleness and barrenness of their youth, that made them worthless and despicable in age. I speak upon a

* 2 Cor. iv. 16.

supposition that you may live to be old; but that may not happen. It is great odds against any one that he will not. You now enjoy the means of grace. God now expects fruit from you. Year after year he comes, seeking it, and if he find none, he may say, "Cut down this fruitless tree; why cumbereth it the ground?" To the young, to all, I say, "The axe is laid to the root of the tree; and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."* I add once more,

3. *Learn the great usefulness of public ordinances.* Let me again remind you, that our text is spoken of those who are "planted in the house of the Lord;" that is, who love his house and ordinances, statedly and seriously attend upon them, and strive to improve them to the purposes for which they were instituted. They may be regularly attended, and yet the soul continue barren. There may be the leaves of an outward profession, but no fruit. Unless you are planted in God's house by faith and love, and make a serious, solemn business of religious exercises, engaging the heart and affections in them, your attendance will be vain. But where there are right dispositions and views, ordinances are adapted to promote the fruitfulness of Christians, and God hath promised his blessing with them. The Lord's supper is particularly suited to further our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. In a word, all Christian ordinances have an evident tendency to revive and maintain the impressions of religion; to strengthen aged Christians under their burdens; to assist their thoughts in meditation and devotion; to comfort them with the views of the divine promises; to make the glories of their Father's house more familiar and delightful to their minds, and to reconcile them to the thoughts of death. I conclude with addressing you all, and especially the aged, in the words of the apostle; "God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge and judgment; that ye may be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus, to the glory and praise of God."† Amen.

* Matt. iii. 10.

† Phil. i. 8—11.

DISCOURSE IV.

CALEB'S REFLECTION ON THE GOODNESS AND FAITHFULNESS OF
GOD TO HIM.

JOSHUA XIV. 10.

And now behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness ; and now lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old.

“THE glory of young men,” saith Solomon, “is their strength ; and the beauty of old men is the grey head.” The strength of young men is truly their glory, when it is employed in the service of God ; and “the hoary head is indeed a crown of glory, when it is found in the way of righteousness.” It was the glory of the person spoken of in the text, that when he was a young man, he was eminent for courage and steady piety ; and when old, for the vigour of his body and the holiness of his soul. As I intend, in this discourse, more particularly to consult the assistance and encouragement of my aged friends, I would recommend to them the temper and example of this aged saint, even Caleb ; and endeavour at the same time to suggest some things which may be useful to all. We read in the history of Israel, that when they were come to the borders of Canaan, Moses, by divine direction, sent out twelve men, one of each tribe, to search that land. When they returned they brought a favourable account of the fruitfulness of it ; but represented the inhabitants as so numerous and strong, that there was no probability of getting possession of it. At this report the people were angry and rebellious. Caleb and Joshua, two of the spies, endeavoured to appease them, by assuring them that they were well able, with God’s assistance, to get possession of the land. Caleb particularly exerted himself with great prudence and courage on this occasion, but to no purpose. God therefore declared that all that rebellious generation should die in the wilderness ; and only Caleb and Joshua among the spies, and some other humble, pious Israelites, should enter the land.* It was particularly promised to Caleb, “Because my servant Caleb had another spirit, different from that of the other spies, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went, and his seed shall possess it.”† Thus God promised Caleb, that for his distinguished piety, fidelity, and courage, he should live to enter into the land of Canaan, and have an inheritance there. We find him in this chapter claiming that promise. He reminds

* Heb. iii. 16.

† Numb. xi. 24.

Joshua, who was then the leader of Israel, of what Moses, in the name of God, had sworn to him, because he wholly followed the Lord; and he claims that particular portion of the land which had been promised him. When he puts in his claim, he speaks with great seriousness and devotion, acknowledging the divine care and fidelity, and looking back with pleasure on his own conduct and God's approbation of it. "And now behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old." The words, in this connexion, will suggest four useful remarks, which I shall consider, and lead you to improve.

I. It is God that keepeth us alive.

II. The aged have peculiar reason to make this acknowledgment.

III. It is a great satisfaction to aged Christians to reflect on their obedience to God, and the accomplishment of his promises to them. And,

IV. The experience which aged Christians have had of God's goodness and faithfulness, is a strong encouragement to hope and trust in him.

I. *It is God who keepeth us alive.*

This is a very obvious remark, but since for that reason we are apt to forget it, and neglect the due improvement of it, it is proper to illustrate it, and assist your reflection upon it. It is of the utmost importance that our minds be furnished with those maxims which are most weighty and useful; and they should be made familiar to the thoughts, that we may have recourse to them in every emergency, to direct our conduct and support our hearts. This is one of the most weighty and useful; that our lives, and all the events of them, are under God's direction and at his disposal. That he keepeth us alive, is evident from his universal providence. "His kingdom ruleth over all;" and "not a sparrow falleth to the ground without him." The scriptures often remind us of this, and urge it as a motive to religious fear, gratitude, and obedience. They teach us, that "in him we live, and move, and have our being;" that "in him is the breath of every living thing and the spirit of all mankind;" that he gave it at first, and that he taketh it away. God claims this with awful majesty, as his prerogative; "Behold I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal." His servants acknowledge this with readiness and pleasure. So Caleb in the text, "Behold the Lord hath kept me alive." So David; "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction." Thus St. Paul acknowledgeth, "Having obtained help of God, I continue

to this day." More particularly God preserveth us from many accidents that would be fatal to us. "He giveth his angels charge over us, to keep us in all our ways." They deliver us from many evils, which we are not sensible of, and perform many kind offices for us, which we do not and cannot perceive. God maintains our health, or raiseth us up from threatening disorders. "To God the Lord belong the issues" or escapes "from death:" and he is known by the name of "the Lord that healeth us."* He giveth us those things that are needful for the body; supplieth us with food and raiment, and every thing necessary for the continuance and support of our lives. Yea, his blessing makes them serviceable for these purposes. For "man liveth not by bread alone, but by the word or blessing of God;" without this, as the prophet Haggai intimates, "we should eat and drink, yet not be satisfied; and clothe us, but not be warm."† When diseases and deaths fly round about us, he preserveth us safe and unhurt. "The Lord is our keeper; the Lord preserveth us from evil; he preserveth our going out and coming in." We have reason devoutly to acknowledge, that he keepeth us alive, when we consider the frailty of our natures, and the diseases and casualties to which we are liable. Who can say, he has been his own guardian? That he hath maintained such temperance and regularity of life, and such a care to guard against dangers, that he hath been his own preserver? Who that thinks at all, but must look higher, and acknowledge the providence of God, the God of his salvation? This is especially proper and becoming, as our lives and comforts have been forfeited by sin. Every benefit we enjoy, every breath we draw, is owing to his wonderful patience; and "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." Let us observe,

II. *The aged have peculiar reason to make this acknowledgment.*

"Behold," saith Caleb, "the Lord hath kept me alive, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and I am this day eighty-five years old." The longer we live, the greater reason we have to acknowledge the protection and care of God. When they arrive at old age, it is proper to do this, with peculiar seriousness and gratitude; considering that, like Caleb, they have been wandering all their days in a wilderness: to that this world is often compared, and none enter more feelingly into the justice and beauty of the comparison than the aged. Dangers surround us on every side. It is a wonder, that the barrenness of this wilderness, its distressing scenes, and the little refreshments which a soul, intent upon a better country, can find here, do not more speedily exhaust the spirits and consume the days of those who wander in it. Again, Caleb had seen the whole

* Exod. xv. 26.

† Hag i 6.

generation, that came out of Egypt with him, dying before him; and there were very few alive who had been the companions of his youth and his travels. The aged cannot but often reflect upon this; what numbers they have survived! what desolation death hath made in the churches, families, and towns, to which they were related! how many of the young and healthy, who were likely to outlive them, have fallen in the wilderness, while they continue! Their own infirmities render the acknowledgment of God's preservation of them almost natural and peculiarly proper. Small things greatly affect them. A little change of weather discomposes them. A slight cold and fever disables, and often destroys them. Troubles, which in early life they could easily have surmounted, hang long and heavy upon them, and sometimes press them into the dust: and when they consider that what strength remains is labour and sorrow, their long continuance in life is an astonishment to them. As they cannot but suppose that every opening year will be their last, every returning year displays new wonders of goodness and mercy; and it is becoming in them gratefully to acknowledge it. Thus David the aged saith, "Thou, O Lord, art my trust from my youth. I am as a wonder to many," that I am yet alive after so many fatigues, dangers, and infirmities; "but thou art my strong refuge. Thou hast done great things, O God; who is like unto thee?"* Further,

III. *It is a great satisfaction to aged saints to reflect on their obedience to God, and the accomplishment of his promises to them.*

Caleb speaks of both these with pleasure. He reminds Joshua, that he had "wholly followed the Lord;" that "the Lord had kept him alive, as he said;" that "the word which the Lord spake to Moses concerning him, had been fulfilled." In like manner, it affords aged Christians great delight to reflect, that, through divine grace, they have wholly followed the Lord; that when, as in the case of the Israelites, the generality have been disobedient and rebellious, have tempted and provoked the most High, they have retained their integrity, and been, upon the whole, faithful to their profession and their vows. They cannot, indeed, but be conscious of many imperfections and defects in their obedience, and will be often dropping a penitential tear over the sins of their youth and riper years. Yet having this testimony, that their hearts were right with God, and that their governing desire and main care have been to please him; this affords them great comfort, and is their support in those evil days, in which there is no earthly pleasure. It is comfortable to them to think that they have devoted their vigorous days to God, and not brought him only the poor remains of their

* Psalm. lxxi. 5—7.

time and strength. It is their joy to think that they had not been entirely useless in the world, the burthens of the earth, the cumberers of the ground, and the scandal of religion. When they reflect, what an untoward generation they have lived in; what temptations they have had to youthful lusts; how prone the love of the world is to destroy the love of God in the days of health and ease; their "rejoicing is this, the testimony of their consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world;" that religion hath been uppermost in their thoughts, and it hath been their chief business in life to serve God and save their own souls. Further, it is a great satisfaction to them to reflect on God's goodness and faithfulness to them: that he hath hitherto supplied all their wants, sustained their hearts, and supported them under those afflictions which they thought would have been too hard for them to bear. They recollect, with gratitude and delight, that grace which begun, maintained, and improved the divine life in their souls, amidst innumerable temptations from without and within: that, though they have fallen into sin, they have been recovered and not suffered to perish in it; and though they have fallen into trouble, they have been prevented from making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. It is pleasant to them to trace up all these streams to the fountain; to consider them as the displays of rich and free grace; as the accomplishment of the promises of God, and proofs of his fidelity. Their mercies were sweet in the enjoyment, and are sweet in the reflection, when they consider them as founded on the covenant of grace, made with all true believers, through Christ Jesus. And this is the delightful conclusion of every reflection upon them, "The Lord hath been good to me, as he said. The Lord hath fulfilled the word which he spake concerning his servant." I proceed to observe,

IV. *The experience, which aged saints have had of God's goodness and faithfulness, is a strong encouragement to them to hope and trust in him.*

Caleb's design, in repeating the divine promises, and recollecting the divine goodness, was to encourage himself in the Lord his God; that he should be assisted to gain and possess the promised inheritance, as well as to claim a title to it. See v. 12. Since God hath kept me alive, "give me the mountain whereof the Lord spake in that day. If so be the Lord will be with me," or (as it may be better rendered, for he seems to have no doubt about it) "seeing the Lord will be with me, I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said." Thus the experience which aged Christians have had of God's care and fidelity, is an earnest of further favours from him, and an encouragement to their hope

and confidence. It gives them a cheerful persuasion that he will still be with them; that he who hath delivered and doth deliver, will still deliver. They can plead with David, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth; now when I am old and grey headed, O God, forsake me not."* They expect further, yea, greater troubles and difficulties in the remaining stages of the wilderness; but they know that the manna, with which they have been fed, will not fail, nor the cloud of protection, which hath sheltered them, be withdrawn, till their wanderings are over. They know that God hath promised, "Even to your old age, I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and deliver you." And this they may depend upon, since "by him they have been borne up and carried even from the womb."† May they not expect that he, who hath sustained them hitherto in the spiritual warfare, will strengthen their feeble hands for the remaining combat; and that "he who hath begun the good work in them, will perform it until the day of Christ?" May they not be confident that he who hath led them so long in the wilderness, will bring them into the good land which he hath promised; yea, at last raise their withered limbs and perished bodies, strong and fair, to share in the honours of their Redeemer's second coming, and the joys of his everlasting kingdom? Thus David, in his old age, argued, "Thou who hast shown me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again, from the depths of the earth."‡ Having thus illustrated the observations arising from the text, I proceed to make a more general improvement of the subject.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us all remember our constant dependence upon God; and learn those useful instructions which that is adapted to teach us.* Whatever be our age, God hath kept us alive hitherto. Let us own this with thankfulness. How absurd and ungrateful is it for men to boast and be proud of their health and strength (for men may be health-proud, as well as purse-proud), and never to acknowledge the hand of God, "who giveth to all life and breath and all things." Let me address you in the language of the Psalmist, "Oh bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard; which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved."§ Doth God keep us alive? This shows the reasonableness of prayer, as expressive of our dependence upon him, and as the way to preserve a devout sense of it upon the heart. It shows that our expressions of prayer and thanksgiving at our meals should be serious and thoughtful. This teaches us to use the proper means of preserving and re-

* Psalm lxxi. 27.

† Isaiah xlvi. 4.

‡ Psalm lxxi. 20.

§ Psalm lxvi. 8, 9.

storing health, in an humble subordination to the divine blessing; and it strongly reprove the iniquity of those who, like Asa, "seek to the physician but not to the Lord."* The remembrance of our dependence upon God would tend to restrain luxury and intemperance, and all those irregularities and excesses which shorten men's days. It would prevent our undertaking any thing that is hazardous to life or health, when not called out to it by providence. It will likewise keep our minds composed amidst the evils we feel or fear, and tend to reconcile us to the removal of our dearest friends and to our own, since our times are in God's hands. It will make us solicitous to say of all our schemes, "If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that," and engage us to seek his blessing. And finally, it will be a powerful motive to secure his friendship, by vigorously pursuing his service. In this view Moses urgeth the thought, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and obey his voice, and cleave to him: for he is thy life and the length of thy days."†

2. *What hath been said should be an inducement to young persons to follow the Lord fully.* Caleb, as a reward for so doing, lived to be very old, and had great pleasure in reflecting on his former conduct. This use an ancient Jewish writer makes of the story; "The Lord gave strength unto Caleb, which remained with him to his old age; so that he entered on the high places of the land, and his seed obtained it for an heritage; that all the children of Israel might see that it is good to follow the Lord."‡ Following the Lord fully may conduce to a long life; it will certainly promote the happiness of life. It may conduce to a long life. Young persons are generally desirous to live to old age. Now religion and stedfast obedience to God are, in their own nature, a probable means of attaining to it; for they prevent those excesses which shorten the days of youth, and by reason of which men do not live out half their days. Religion contributes to health and peace and cheerfulness. "What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days, that he may see good?"§ Solomon confirms this sentiment, "In wisdom's right hand are length of days. The fear of the Lord prolongeth days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened."|| God will reward early piety with long life, if he seeth that, upon the whole, it is best for you. But it will certainly promote the happiness of life. For "godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come." Besides the immediate pleasure attending a course of stedfast obedience, you will have delightful reflections on what is past; that you have spent your vigorous days in the service of God, and are growing up to a greater maturity for heaven; while youthful sinners are dead in their sins, turned into hell, and suffering the fatal irretrievable

* 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

† Deut. xxx. 20.

‡ Eccles. xlv. 9, 10.

§ Psalm xxxiv. 12.

|| Prov. iii. 16, x. 27.

consequences of their own cowardice and folly. Instead of "possessing the iniquities of your youth;" having your "bones full of them," and "mourning at the last, when the flesh and body are consumed," you will have unspeakable pleasure in being able to appeal to God, with Hezekiah, "that you have walked before him in truth, and with an upright heart, and have done that which was good in his sight." In consequence of this, you will find him gracious and faithful in assisting, supporting, and rewarding you. "Remember therefore thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;" none but what religion affords and hope inspires. I only add,

3. *The example of Caleb is worthy the imitation of aged Christians.* To you, my honoured fathers, I would respectfully address. Hath God kept you alive fourscore or threescore years? Take this good old man for your model, and endeavour to be like minded. Let your speech, like his, be serious and devout, the remainder of your days be devoted to God's service, and continue to hope and trust in him. Let your speech be serious and devout. When, like Caleb, you are mentioning your age, your contemporaries, or what happened in the former parts of your lives, let it be done with seriousness; with an humble and thankful acknowledgment of God. Say not, I have lived so long, or am so old, but, The Lord hath kept me alive. Bear testimony to his goodness and faithfulness. Speak of his care in preserving you hitherto, with admiration and thankfulness. Thus the patriarch Jacob said, "God who hath fed me all my life long to this day, and redeemed me from all evil."* Further, let the remainder of your lives be faithfully devoted to God's service. One important branch of this is, humbly to relate your own experience for the instruction and consolation of others. So Caleb did: "When my brethren were disobedient and rebellious, I wholly followed the Lord my God." Let your relations and friends, especially your descendants, know what God hath done for you, and what he hath enabled you to do for him. Assure them, as from long observation and experience you can, that sin is bitterness in the end; that God's commandments are not grievous; that an interest in Christ is the good part and that a life spent in communion with God is the pleasantest life any man can lead. Such declarations will come with peculiar gracefulness and force from persons of your age, when attended with that modesty and humility which your long acquaintance with your own imperfections and the constitution of the gospel will be likely to promote: for you must be strangely ignorant of both, if you speak of your experiences with vain glory and

* Gen. xlviii. 15.

boasting. All will be ascribed by you to the riches of divine grace in Christ Jesus, and you will boast only in the Lord. Thus David in his old age resolved, "My tongue shall show forth thy salvation, and talk of thy righteousness all the day long; for I know not the numbers thereof. I will show thy strength to this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come."* Again, you are to serve God, your preserver, by being active in all the duties of life, which you have ability to discharge; you may not perhaps be able to say as Caleb (in the verse following the text) "As yet I am strong this day, as I was forty years ago;" nevertheless, what natural strength remaineth should be employed for God. But I hope your spiritual strength is much greater than it was forty years ago: that you are more able to carry on the Christian combat, to drive out remaining corruptions, and will be faithful unto death. You are also to serve God by humbly waiting all the intimations of his will; by bearing up contentedly and cheerfully under the infirmities of age, and striving and watching that your tempers may not be soured by your own afflictions, or the vices and follies of the rising generation. Finally, your past experiences should be an incentive to you to "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God." Hope in him, that he will yet fulfil his promises, and particularly that he will never forsake you. The last words of the aged and pious Dr. Guyse were, "O my God, thou hast always been with me, and wilt not leave me now." God may prolong your wanderings in the wilderness, and add many days yet to your wearisome pilgrimage: but remember, Canaan is before you; an inheritance which will abundantly repay all the labours and fatigues of the wilderness. Thither God hath promised to bring you. "Hold fast, therefore, the profession of your faith, and the confidence of your hope, without wavering, firm unto the end: for he is faithful who hath promised."

DISCOURSE V.

THE DESIGN AND IMPROVEMENT OF USELESS DAYS AND
WEARISOME NIGHTS.

JOB VII. 3.

*So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights
are appointed to me.*

It is an observation of Mr. Addison, that "inquiries after happiness and rules for attaining it are not, on some accounts, so necessary and useful to mankind, as the arts of consolation, and supporting one's self under affliction." Convinced of this from

* Psalm lxxi. 15—18.

the frequent scenes of distress to which I have been a witness, I think I can scarce engage in a more benevolent design, than to offer assistance and comfort to my suffering fellow-creatures. The book of Job furnishes us with excellent materials for this desirable work. I propose at this time to consider that circumstance of Job's affliction which is mentioned in the text; as it particularly suits the case of the aged, whom I am now more immediately to address. This holy man is describing his melancholy situation, and the sad effects of his bodily disorders. These increased the weight of his other calamities, and made him desirous of death, as the only sure relief. "As a servant" saith he, "after a hard day's labour, earnestly desireth the shadow of the evening; and as a hireling looking for the reward of his work," so do I long for my release from this misery (for thus the sense must be supplied); since "I am made to possess months of vanity," that is, useless and unprofitable months; "and wearisome nights," painful, restless nights, "are appointed to me;" I possess them as my inheritance; for so the word signifies. From hence we may observe,

I. That useless days and wearisome nights may be the portion of the best of men.

II. When it is so, they are to be considered as the appointment of Providence, and improved accordingly.

I. Useless days and wearisome nights may be allotted to the best of men;

To those who, like Job, are righteous and upright in the sight of God, and have been, like him, healthy, vigorous, and useful. "Months of vanity" are months void of health, activity, and usefulness; and these are a kind of inheritance to us: for man is "born to trouble, as the sparks naturally fly upwards." This is almost always the case of the aged. The days of old age are called, "the evil days, in which there is no pleasure;" no earthly pleasure. But this to an aged Christian is not so grievous, as that they are months of vanity, in which he is capable of doing little for the glory of God and the good of his fellow-creatures. This is sometimes owing to the decay of the faculties; so that the poor sufferer becomes ignorant, forgetful, and helpless, like a child. Sometimes it arises from the decay of bodily strength and vigour, and a continued succession of aches and sorrows: so that the afflicted person cannot move at all, or not without much pain; or all his vital actions are attended with a certain uneasiness, which is sometimes less tolerable than pain itself. Hence an ancient writer calls old age, "a middle state between health and sickness." When nature bears much, it can do little. The man is unfit for business: he becomes listless in religious duties, yea, can scarce do any thing that will turn to account. This is often the case with others, besides the aged;

when they are visited with acute diseases or labour under a lingering illness. Through weakness of body and pining sickness, they (as Job expresseth it) “never eat with pleasure;” and can neither work nor move with any life or comfort. It is some relief, in such a case, for the sufferer to have a good night and refreshing sleep; and thereby get a little strength to discharge the duties of life, or to bear its burdens. But Job had, and many have, wearisome nights appointed to them. Some are “visited with pain on their beds, and the multitude of their bones with strong pain.” Some, if they lie down, they cannot breathe, and must therefore be supported in an uneasy posture. Others, through disagreeable sensations, are restless, and the little sleep they have is disturbed and unrefreshing. Sometimes dejection of spirit brings on a variety of fears; which though groundless and unreasonable, are as troublesome as if they were just, and cannot be conquered. There is often an uneasiness and restlessness of mind without any apparent cause, which drives away sleep, or makes it very unquiet. In weak constitutions, a little change in the air and weather deprives them of this refreshment. Anxious thoughts, and the pressure of other afflictions, destroy the repose of the night; so that the sufferer cannot forget his sorrows by sleep, but they haunt his very dreams. He sometimes counts the hours in a long succession; the time appears dreadfully tedious, and he arises in the morning weakened and tired, instead of being refreshed. Thus Job describes his case in the verse following the text, and many feel the justice of his description; “When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My bed doth not comfort me, nor my couch ease my complaint,” v. 13. This is sometimes the case with God’s dearest children, and especially of the aged. Now, what shall support and comfort them under so heavy an affliction? There is nothing so well adapted to do it as this thought, that it is the Lord’s doing; and that is the second observation from the text.

II. *Months of vanity and wearisome nights are to be considered as the appointment of God, and to be improved accordingly.*

This is implied in the expression here used, they “are appointed to me,” compared with verse 1 of this chapter; “Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?” For who hath fixed and determineth his time, but the great God, the Lord of life and time? In the 14th verse, Job expressly ascribes his wearisome nights to the providence of God: “Thou scarest me with dreams.” So the Psalmist doth, “Thou holdest mine eyes waking.”* And indeed, nothing can be more plain from the dictates of reason

* Psalm lxxvii. 4.

and the language of scripture, especially of this book. The original constitution of human nature was formed by him. The materials of which it is composed; the food, air, and other things on which it depends for support, are all of such a nature as to intimate that it was intended to wear out and decay. The hand of God is to be acknowledged in all our diseases. He woundeth and maketh sore. He giveth sleep, and causeth it to fly from our eyes. Whatever natural causes may occasion pain, weakness, and incapacity, all are to be traced up to the divine direction and appointment. He allotteth to us whatever is painful and disagreeable by day or by night. It is a very comfortable thought, that he appoints them, or (as the word is sometimes translated) numbers them. The number, the degree, the continuance of our infirmities, are all exactly marked out and determined by him: and they shall not be more in number, nor heavier in their pressure, nor longer in their continuance, than he sees it best, in order to answer his wise and gracious purposes concerning us. Now, he appoints to his creatures useless months and wearisome nights, for some or other of these important ends: namely, to restrain an earthly spirit, and bring them to serious consideration and piety, to exercise their graces, especially their humility, patience, meekness, and contentment, to promote the advantage of others, and to confirm their own hopes and awaken their desires of a blessed immortality. God intends hereby,

1. To restrain an earthly spirit, and bring them to serious consideration and piety. That the world and present things have generally an undue influence upon our hearts, and indispose us for the concerns of religion, is evident by melancholy experience; the best Christians see, and feel, and lament it. In order to restrain the inordinate love of the world, God is pleased to visit men with pain and sickness. When they are continually toiling about the world, rising early, sitting up late, and wearying themselves in the pursuit of it, neither their ministers nor their consciences can convince them that they are too eager, and are endangering their own souls. God then taketh the work into his own hands, confines them by pain and weakness, and renders them incapable of their former hot pursuits. He gives them time to think and consider, which otherwise they would not have taken. He obligeth them to sit alone, and keepeth their eyes waking, that they may commune with their own hearts. He takes away their pleasing satisfaction in earthly things, that they may see their emptiness, and think of something better. The smarting rod leads their thoughts to his hand; brings them to repentance, that they have so much forgotten him in their days of health and prosperity. And whereas before they prayed not at all, or only in a cold, formal manner, now, as the prophet expresseth it, "in

trouble they visit God, and pour out a prayer when his chastening is upon them.”* Allow me, in this connexion, to mention an instance of a young man, who had long been confined with a diseased limb, and was near his dissolution. When, at the desire of a friend, his loathsome sore was uncovered, he said, “There it is, and a precious treasure it hath been to me! It saved me from the folly and vanity of youth; it made me cleave to God as my only portion, and to eternal glory as my only hope, and I think it hath now brought me very near to my Father’s house.” The aged are often unwilling to resign worldly labours and cares, when they might properly do it; and some of them are never satisfied with earth till they are buried in it. Their desires enlarge as they advance in years; and they grow more covetous of wealth the less they want it, and the less time and spirit they have to enjoy it. God, therefore, in compassion to them, lays them aside; shows them, by irresistible arguments, that it is time to have done; and finds them work enough in the necessary care of their pained dying bodies. Thus they are led to think seriously of God, of themselves, and eternity; to see their dependence on the most High; to seek his favour through Christ while it may be obtained, and look out for a firmer support than earthly things can afford. By frequent pains and infirmities God keeps his people always watchful against the world, that encroaching enemy; makes them apply with greater diligence to the most important business of religion; and leads them to be daily expecting and preparing for that great and awful change which will fix their eternal state. Further, God designs thereby

2. To exercise and strengthen their graces, especially their humility, patience, meekness, and contentment. It is very difficult habitually to practise these virtues, especially if we have long enjoyed health and ease. But when God toucheth our bone and our flesh, he calls us to, and disposeth us for, the exercise of them. He teacheth us humility by showing us what vile bodies we have; on how many things they depend for health, activity, and repose, which are not in our own power; that we may not be proud of them, nor take too much pains about them, but be chiefly solicitous about the welfare of the immortal spirit. He brings men by such afflictions to see and own his justice; to humble themselves for sin, and accept the punishment of their iniquity; and so they are disposed to fall in with his saving design, as exhibited in the gospel, to trust in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in themselves. He thus brings down their high thoughts of themselves; shows them that they are not of so much consequence to the world as they thought themselves to be; that their retirement and incapacity

* Isa. xxvi. 16.

cause no chasm in it, and that he can carry on his schemes without them. He exerciseth their patience, a most important grace in this state of trial! He shows the sufferers what degree of self-government, what command of their passions, they have attained. By repeated strokes he brings down the fretful reluctant spirit, and makes it lie at his footstool calm and composed. "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience," or proof of the sufferer's integrity and God's supporting goodness. By obliging them to depend upon others for help under their infirmities, he teaches them meekness and thankfulness, softeneth their spirits, and openeth their hearts to tenderness and gratitude. He sometimes keeps them long in this afflicted state, that patience may have its perfect work, and their souls be made humble, submissive, and tractable, "as a weaned child."* Another design of Providence is,

3. To promote the good and advantage of others. It is an observation of a lively writer, that "God makes one half of the human species a moral lesson to the other." Thus he set forth Job as an example of enduring affliction and of patience. He showeth the healthy and active, by the infirmities of some who are of their own age, how soon and how easily their strength may be weakened in the way. He leads them, by a view of the decays of age, to conclude that the decline of life is a very unfit time to begin the great work of religion, or make any considerable progress in it; and that this work ought to be the employment of our best and most vigorous days. Thus they may be quickened to redeem their time and work out their own salvation, before this painful, helpless season cometh upon them. Such afflictions show them how little wealth and honour can do to ease the pains of the day, or secure the repose of the night. And if they will receive instruction from such scenes, this is the important lesson they teach, that "a man's life or happiness consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth."† The infirmities of aged Christians may tend to make their acquaintance habitually thankful for days of ease and activity and nights of repose. By showing them how useless they may become, God instructs them to behave in an humble, friendly, and obliging manner; that when the days of sorrow seize upon them, they may find others ready to pity and help them. The afflictions of aged persons give their descend-

* Psalm cxxxi. 2.

† "Nuper me cujusdam amici languor admonuit, optimos esse nos dum infirmi sumus. Quem enim infirmum aut avaritia aut libido sollicitat? Non amoribus servit, non appetit honores, opes negligit, et quantulumcunque, ut relicturus, satis habet; tunc deos, tunc hominem se esse, meminit; invidet nemini, neminem miratur, neminem despicit, ac ne sermonibus quidem malignis aut attendit, aut alitur. Possum ergo, quod pluribus verbis, pluribus etiam voluminibus, philosophi docere conantur, ipse breviter tibi mihique præcipere, ut tales esse sani perseveremus, quæ'es nos futuros profitemur infirmi."—Plin. Epis. lib. 7, ep. 26.

ants an opportunity of showing tenderness and humanity, and of requiting their parents: and they should lead all to remember, and behave to, "them that suffer adversity, as being themselves in the body," liable to the same infirmities, and to want the same assistance.* To all which I may add, that the afflicted saint may, in the strongest way, recommend religion to others, by manifesting the good influence which its principles and motives have upon his heart. Once more: God intends by these infirmities,

4. To confirm their hopes and excite their desires of a blessed immortality. They tend to confirm their hopes of it. The pains, weakness, and incapacity of pious and benevolent men, for months, and sometimes years together, are a considerable proof of a future state. Creatures, endowed with reason, formed in the image of God, and capable of glorifying him, seem to suffer, in this respect, more than the brutes. This plainly intimates, that there is a future life, and that "a rest remaineth to the people of God." When it is considered how much of our time is necessarily spent in sleep; how little many of the best of men can do for God and their fellow-creatures, for a long time together, through mental or bodily weakness, we reasonably conclude that there is another state of being; that the final reward of piety is not here; but that God hath something infinitely better in reserve for his servants. They are not shut up in eternal night without hope, but there is an everlasting day of light, ease, activity, and joy, speedily to dawn upon them. These afflictions tend likewise to direct their thoughts to a future state, and excite their desires of it. "Sickness," saith Mr. Pope, "is a sort of early old age; it inspires us with the thoughts of a future state, better than a thousand volumes of philosophers and divines." It leads Christians, with Job, to long for that state, as a servant doth for the evening, and the hireling for his wages. Even the hope of glory would hardly be sufficient to keep those desires lively and active, if God was not to embitter earth to us. He taketh his people off from sensible things, and makes them "groan, being burdened, that they may be willing to be unclothed." We are too fond of these cottages of clay. God therefore takes away the pleasure of the day and the repose of the night, that he may loosen our attachment to earth, and make us willing to go at his call. Yet the true Christian doth not desire death merely as a release from pain and weakness, but as it puts him into a capacity of serving and enjoying God better than he can do here. It is worse than death to the zealous Christian to be lifeless and useless; and he is ready to say, with the pious Mr. Daniel Burgess, "I had rather be idle under ground than above

* "In age, in infancy, from others' aid
Is all our hope; to teach us to be kind." YOUNG.

ground." He, therefore, looks with pleasure towards the grave as the place in which he shall leave all his pains and infirmities; and he looks with faith and desire beyond it, to the heavenly world, where there shall never be a painful, tiresome hour; but he shall see God, and serve him day and night without weariness, interruption, or period. Thus God doth intend, by weakness and infirmity, to restrain an earthly spirit, and bring men to serious consideration and piety, to exercise and strengthen their graces, especially those which are so necessary and useful in the present state; namely, humility, patience, meekness, and contentment. He intends also, by this wholesome discipline of some, to promote the good of others, who may be witnesses of their afflictions and temper, and to confirm their own hopes, and excite and cherish their desires of eternal rest and glory. These blessed effects of their sufferings God's servants have often experienced; insomuch that one of the most holy and active of them, Dr. Rivet, said, he "had learned more divinity in ten days' sickness than in fifty years' study." Let me now add a few reflections from the subject.

REFLECTIONS.

1. *They whose days are useful and their nights comfortable, have great reason to be continually thankful.* This is the case of many, of most persons, and it demands their fervent gratitude to God. You have probably known the reverse of this in times of bodily sickness or distress of mind. Call to remembrance, then, the former days and nights, that you may give glory to God as the restorer and guardian of your health, whose mercies are new every morning, and may render unto him according to the benefits conferred upon you. They have peculiar reason for thankfulness, on whose health and capacity for thought and labour their families entirely depend for their support. What a dreadful addition would it be to the pain of unprofitable months, and the distress of sleepless nights, to think of a beloved wife and children ready to perish through your inability to labour! The aged, who have any comfortable days and nights, will be very ungrateful if they are insensible of the divine goodness, and if their expressions of complaint are more frequent and more hearty than their expressions of thankfulness. Let the persons who are in health and vigour, "whose sinews take rest in the night season,"* consider whether they have not deserved to be in the deplorable case of Job; whether they have not abused their health, lived in the forgetfulness of God, trifled away their time, and paid little attention to the "one thing needful." Nay, who among us hath employed his health and strength for God so diligently as he should have

* Job xxx. 17.

done? "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not afflicted, pained, consumed, and because his compassions fail not." Let us learn to be habitually thankful for a day of ease and activity, and a comfortable night. Let every morning and evening find us on our knees, devoutly adoring that beneficent Being who "causeth the outgoing of the morning and the evening to rejoice."

2. *Let us learn, from this subject, to expect and prepare for the days of affliction.* "If a man," saith Solomon, "live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many."* Endeavour to be deeply convinced of the great uncertainty of health and ease. Be careful to improve them in the service of God, that you may have comfortable reflections upon it, when they are taken away from you. How many persons, in a full flow of health and spirits, have their months vanity, and their nights wearisome, by idleness, luxury, and the inordinate love of company and diversions! They spend their days, and many of their nights too, in rioting and gaming; inverting the order of nature and providence; sleeping away the precious hours of day-light; leaving little or no time for devotion, studying the word of God, and doing good in their stations. A sad preparation this, for afflictions and death! God doth not make them, but they make themselves, to possess such unprofitable time. Oh, think, ye giddy dissipated mortals, what your sickly afflicted friends would give for a tenth part of that health and vivacity which you devote to vanity and sin, forgetful of your rational natures, and the eternal world to which you are hastening. Awake, sirs, and be wise. When you have health, leisure, and cheerfulness, use them for God and your souls. Watch and pray. Be diligent to secure an interest in Christ and the blessings of his glorious gospel. Lay up a treasure of Christian knowledge, experience, and consolation, against the evil days come upon you; for you will then want it all. Be it your care to practise self-denial, and be patient and calm under lighter evils; that you may not sink under the burdens of sickness and age, and have an uneasy conscience, bitter reflections on lost time, and fearful looking for of vengeance, to add to these burdens. When the learned Grotius lay on his death-bed, an intimate friend desired, that, in his great wisdom, he would give him some advice how he might so live as to secure future happiness; to whom Grotius only said, as I would say to you, "Be serious." Finally,

3. *Let me exhort and comfort those who are afflicted as Job was.* Remember, my aged and suffering friends, what the text intimates, that your afflictions are all appointed, and their degree and continuance exactly measured and determined, by that God

* Eccles. xi. 8.

in whose hand your breath is ; and who, if you are Christians indeed, is your God and Father in Christ Jesus. Remember that nothing befalls you but what is "common to men ;" and that is a reason against complaining. Perhaps some of you may read your sin in your punishment. You have been too eager about the world ; and now God hath rendered you almost incapable of doing any thing. You have done little for God and religion, while you had ability ; and now, in righteous judgment, he hath much lessened that ability. You have, perhaps, often excused your non-attendance on public worship by some slight disorder ; and now God hath sent some great and painful one upon you. You would now sleep in the night, and cannot ; perhaps you can recollect the time, at least the place, the house of God in particular, when you should have kept awake, and would not. But if there have been any things of this kind amiss, I hope your consciences are now reproving you, and that your afflictions will lead you to repentance, and make your hearts better. Let me address in comfortable words to God's aged and afflicted servants. He giveth you some intervals of health ; at least, ease : every day is not useless ; every night is not wearisome. Let his name be praised by you on this account. You may yet be in some degree useful, and should labour to be so. No Christian, who hath his understanding and speech, need be quite useless. You can yet pray to God for yourselves, your families, and friends, and for the interest of religion. You can talk of God's wondrous works, and show forth his righteousness, truth, and praise, to your relations and acquaintance. You may be examples of patience, humility, contentment, and thankfulness ; and so do honour to religion and good to others. And if you act thus, God will "give you songs in the night ;"* support you under your burdens ; and communicate light and peace to your souls, when the body is pained and the eyes kept waking. These infirmities remind you that the day of your deliverance is at hand. Indeed, as that excellent divine, Dr. Evans, said in his last sickness, which was very lingering and painful, "The formality and ceremony of taking down this tabernacle by degrees is irksome and grievous ; how much better were it, if it pleased God, that it might tumble at once ! But the will of God be done." The happy period is nigh, when if you are not able to say with your last breath, as he did with his, "All is well ; all is well ;" you will assuredly find it to be so. For time and changes, grief and death, will be all over, and one eternal day shine upon your souls. No weary hour, no sick moment, no degree of uneasiness shall be felt in heaven ; but the soul will be all life and vigour in the service and enjoyment of God. "There shall be no night there ; no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; but fulness of

* Job xxxv. 10.

joy, and pleasures for evermore." Believe these, Christians; for "they are the true sayings of God." I would not part with such hopes for the whole world. Let us comfort ourselves and one another with these words. God only knoweth how few years, or months, or days, may remain for us. Let it be our care to glorify him by active services or patient sufferings; by doing or bearing his will; to have our conversation in heaven, and to "wait all the days of our appointed time, till our change come."* And God grant that all "the afflictions of the present time, which are comparatively light and but for a moment, may work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" Amen.

DISCOURSE VI.

GOD'S PROMISE TO BEAR AND CARRY HIS AGED SERVANTS CONSIDERED.

ISAIAH XLVI. 4.

And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you.

It is an important observation, that "many promises of the Old Testament, which display the mercy of God to the Jewish nation, are cited in the New Testament as belonging to true Christians, and applicable to them, whether they had been Jews or gentiles: because the Jews were a figure of the true church of God; and the spiritual meaning of those promises is designed to be applied to all who are the Israel of God, that is, truly pious persons."† For the same reason, we are justified in applying other promises for the comfort of true Christians, when their state and circumstances are such as to stand in need of the promised blessings, and to render such promises pertinent to their case. And indeed, without such a liberty of explaining and applying the promises of the Old Testament to our own souls, as the apostles have taught us, for our private and spiritual advantage, a good part of the writings of the prophets, even some of those which refer to the days of the Messiah, will be impoverished, and drained of many of their richest blessings. Whereas, there is a large and heavenly treasure of grace and blessing contained in those exceeding great and precious promises, and transferred to the gentile church under the New Testament. From these, true Christians in all succeeding ages, as well as in the apostolic times, have found support and relief

* Job xiv. 14.

† Watts.

under their temptations and sorrows. Upon these principles I dare apply the gracious promise in the text to aged saints ; and would endeavour at this time to be a helper of their holiness and their joy.

The design of this chapter is to caution the Israelites against the idolatry of the Babylonians, and to prevent their fears of any mischief which idol gods could do. In order to this, the prophet describes the desolation that Cyrus should bring upon Babylon, and foretells that he should carry captive their gods, who would be insufficient to help either their worshippers or themselves. And then God calls upon his people, in the text and following verse, to consider whether he was such a God as these. He reminds them of what he had already done for them in the formation of their state, and their support hitherto; that he had shown all the care and tenderness of a parent to them; and would continue his favour even to the decline of their state, when, as the prophet Hosea expresseth it, "grey hairs were here and there upon them," that is, the evident symptoms of decay and dissolution. It appears no way improbable that the words may have a further reference to, and be particularly designed to comfort, God's aged servants, who should live till near, or quite to, the end of the captivity; as we find by the book of Ezra several did, whose eyes saw the ruin of the first, and the dedication of the second temple. To comfort and animate their hearts, who expected to die in a strange land, and were greatly distressed at the remembrance of Zion, God encourages them still to hope in him, with an assurance that he would be their refuge and strength in Babylon, as well as Judea. "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you." I shall endeavour to illustrate,

I. God's promise to his aged saints in the text.

II. The reasons here suggested why they should confide in it: and then shall add a few reflections upon the whole. I am,

I. *To open and illustrate God's promise to his aged saints in the text.*

And here you will observe, that God's regard to them, and concern for them, is expressed in a variety of phrases, that they might have strong consolation. "I will carry—bear—and deliver." It may not be easy to show the precise distinct meaning of each of these words. They intimate in general, that God will afford them such assistances as their circumstances require. More particularly that he will support them under all their burdens and difficulties; comfort them under all their sorrows and infirmities; and finally, deliver them from all their fears and tribulations. And if these thoughts, and the illustrations of them, should not be entirely distinct, perhaps they may not

be less edifying to those for whose use they are principally intended.

1. God promiseth to support them under their burdens, and carry them through their difficulties. "I will carry you." The word signifies, to *sustain* any pressure, or *bear* any burden. It intimates God's readiness to help them, when they seem likely to be overborne and pressed down. And how many are the burdens of old age from without! From the world, which still hangs too much about them. Sometimes they are too fond of it, which is their fault. Sometimes their circumstances are such, that they cannot get rid of its cares and hurries, which is their misfortune. But as it is a trial appointed by Providence, they may expect to be carried through the difficulties that surround them; and be supported under the burdens that lie heavy upon them from this quarter. Their fellow-creatures are often a burden to them. Those with whom they are obliged to have dealings of various kinds, are apt to impose upon them, and take advantage of their decays to deceive them. Those in whom they place confidence sometimes disappoint them; and some, from whom they have the highest reason to expect help and assistance, forsake them, and prove unkind and ungrateful to them. This is the most grievous burden, and would be too heavy for them to bear were it not that "the eternal God is their refuge, and underneath them are his everlasting arms." Nay, events, that in the vigour of life would have given them little concern, and scarce have made any impression upon their minds, now hang as a heavy weight upon them; for "the grasshopper is a burden." Every little thing is ready to upset them, but God will carry them by supporting their spirits, and putting strength into them, so that they shall not faint and sink. When the lightest cares are ready to overwhelm them, and business, which requires a little thought or application, is too much for them; in this case, the Lord Jehovah is their help, when they are not able to help themselves; and "as their day is, so shall their strength be."

2. He will comfort them under all their infirmities and sorrows. "I will bear," saith the Almighty. The word sometimes signifies, as the former did, to support and sustain; but more frequently, to *exalt* or *elevate*: and may denote lifting up the soul in joy and comfort; and so it may be considered as an advance upon the former thought. Solomon, in a beautiful and emphatical manner, describes old age as the "evil days," in which there is "no pleasure." The sight decays, the limbs tremble, the appetite is gone, and wearisome days and nights are appointed to them. Almost every aged person we see and converse with, is a comment upon his words. The infirmities of nature come upon them apace; the senses grow weak; the active powers decay: they need the help of others almost as much as in their infancy. And such is the union of the soul and body,

such the dependence of the mind upon the animal frame, that the spirit suffers by the flesh, and oftentimes the faculties of the soul languish, as the bodily powers do. Their relish for company, business, and pleasure, is gone. But that is not the worst infirmity; for they find their thoughts confused, their affection to divine things flags, and they cannot serve God with such fixedness of heart, such warmth of zeal and love, as they have done. What they hear and read quickly slips away; and their minds are not easily impressed with divine truths as they have formerly been. In these melancholy circumstances God will bear and lift up their souls. He sometimes, in a wonderful manner, strengthens the powers of the mind, when the body is in the most languishing state; and they enjoy the light of his countenance when nature is most decayed. Or, if they have not sensible manifestations of his favour and love, they find what is, perhaps, a surer ground of hope, their purposes for God and his ways more fixed, their graces vigorous, and their evidences for heaven clear. Under the infirmities of nature, he will afford them the consolations of religion; elevate their minds above the world, and all its low cares and concerns; raise them above the trifles of earth and sense; strengthen their faith in his promises; and enlighten the eyes of their understandings, to see the rich and glorious inheritance of the saints, and their own title to it, and qualification for it. He will make their chambers of confinement and affliction comfortable, and give them foretastes of the glory to be revealed. In a word, they will find, as St. Paul did, that "though their outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."* Once more,

3. God will deliver them out of all their fears and tribulations. "Even I will carry, and will deliver you." Many are the troubles they feel; many are those they fear. But "the righteous crieth, and the Lord heareth him, and delivereth him out of all his afflictions." Many of God's aged servants, through the languor of their spirits or weakness of their faith, are continually distressed with anxious fears of poverty and contempt, of afflictions increasing upon them; lest they should want before they die, leave their families in distress, or, which affects them more, lest their descendants should behave so as to bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. But the Lord will deliver them from all their fears, and strengthen their hearts. So St. Paul experienced; "We were troubled," said he, "on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us."† They are liable to many temptations; and Satan takes advantage of their infirmities to buffet and affright them. When they read of Lot, and Solomon, and others, who, after a long course of steady piety, forsook God, or did evil in their old age, it terrifies them

* 2 Cor. iv. 16,

† 2 Cor. vii. 5.

lest they should prove apostates ; or, after a long profession of religion, cause the good ways of God to be blasphemed. In this instance he will deliver them ; for, as St. Paul observeth, “ God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape.”* “Through fear of death,” some of them “are all their life-time subject to bondage.” But God, who knows their hearts, will dispel their doubts and fears, and make them, with the apostle, “desire to depart and be with Christ.” At length he will give them complete deliverance ; an everlasting release from every thing that is painful and distressing. He will carry them on angels’ wings to the heavenly mansions, and put them in possession of that rest which remaineth to the people of God. Thus have I endeavoured to unfold this delightful promise ; and shown you that God here engageth to support his aged servants under their burdens, yea, to comfort their hearts under all their sorrows and infirmities, and at length to deliver them from all their fears and tribulations. I proceed,

II. *To consider the reasons suggested in the text, why they should confide in this promise.*

And I hope you will observe them, and attend to the force of them. He is your Maker, he hath been careful of you hitherto, and he is an unchangeable God.

1. He is your Maker. “I have made,” saith he, “and I will bear.” This is a truth you will readily assent to, that God made you ; formed your bodies and souls. Now why did he make you, but to communicate happiness to you, that you might serve him on earth and be for ever with him ? He, then, who freely gave you life, will, of his merey, grant you every needful good. He will have a regard to the work of his own hands, and not forsake it. It is observable that, when God is reproving his people for being afraid of man, he thus expostulates with them, “Why forgettest thou the Lord thy Maker ?”† God made you ; must he not therefore be a very wise Being ? Must he not exactly know the state both of the inward and the outward man ? be intimately acquainted with all your infirmities and imperfections, both of body and mind ? Must he not see the dangers to which you are liable in many circumstances in which you cannot see them yourselves ? Must he not know all your distresses and fears ? And hath not so wise a Being an access to your minds, and cannot he strengthen, support, and comfort them ? Can he ever be at a loss for means to deliver his people ? No : be assured of this, that the Lord who gave you your being, “knows how to deliver the godly out of their tribulations,” and counterwork all the designs of men or devils against them. God made you : must he not therefore be a very powerful Being ? And

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† Isa. li. 13.

can any thing be too hard for him? Is any evil so great from which he cannot deliver you? Is any good so valuable and important that he cannot confer upon you? Surely he who raised this mortal frame from common dust, can, with infinite ease, strengthen it, remove its disorders, or make the spirits cheerful, and cause your consolations to abound as your tribulations do. "Trust in the Lord for ever," the Lord your Maker, "who is of great power, whose understanding is infinite, and in whom is everlasting strength." Another argument is,

2. He hath been careful of you and kind to you hitherto. This is intimated in the text, which is a promise of *continued* care and favour; and it is plainly expressed in the preceding verse, "Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb." God urgeth this as a reason why his servants should trust his promises and still depend upon him. It is he, as David gratefully acknowledges, who took you out of the womb, "made you to hope when you were upon your mother's breast." "I was cast upon thee from the womb," saith he; "thou art my God from my mother's belly."* He hath been the guide of your youth; carried you in the arms of his power; cherished you in the bosom of his love; in six and in seven troubles preserved you; supported you under a multitude of evils, any one of which had overwhelmed you if he had not been your help. He hath often defended you even against yourselves; against the natural consequences of your own inconsideration and rashness. Have you not reason to acknowledge, with the aged patriarch Jacob, that the God of your fathers has fed you "all your life long" to this day, and redeemed you from evil?† Now what stronger argument can there be to encourage your faith in his promises, than your long experience of his goodness and care; and recollecting all the way the Lord hath led you through the wilderness? To distrust him will be peculiarly unreasonable, and highly ungrateful; as if in the long course of your lives you had been independent and self-sufficient creatures; or the mercies of God were trifling and insignificant, and no proofs of his power and goodness. Holy men of old have thought it a very substantial reason to exercise faith in God, because they have long experienced his care. So David argued in the decline of life, "O Lord, thou hast taught me from my youth; forsake me not when strength faileth; thou shalt quicken and comfort me on every side."‡ So Paul the aged argued in his second letter to Timothy, which was probably the last he wrote: "I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion; and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom."§ You have found it good to hope in him hitherto. He hath satisfied your desires,

* Psalm xxii. 9, 10.

† Psalm lxxvi. 17, 20.

‡ Gen. xlviii. 9.

§ 2 Tim. iv. 18.

and often exceeded them. Hath he carried you sixty or seventy years, and will he cease his care and withdraw his kindness? How unreasonable such a conclusion! God hath been an old friend to you; a tried friend; and you may be assured he will never leave you nor forsake you; especially when you consider,

3. He is an unchangeable God. This seems to be intimated in that phrase, "To your old age I am He." An expressive word, which is elsewhere rendered "the same." "Thou art the same."* I am He, that I was of old, to the saints in former generations, and shall continue the same through every succeeding age, and not like the idols of the heathen, that were made yesterday, and are destroyed to-morrow. This proves that God is the proper object of our trust and confidence. He is "the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning." "I am the Lord," says he, "I change not, therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed." He hath been "the dwelling place of his people in all generations." Your fathers trusted in him; and you have heard with your ears, and your fathers have told you, what great things he did for them, and in the old time before them. Creatures change, but he is the same. When men grow old, they often find that their friends forsake them, their old acquaintance look shy on them; their children sometimes turn their backs upon them; the world is almost weary of them, and wisheth them gone. But their God is the same powerful, wise, and gracious Being, that he ever was. "His arm is not shortened, that he cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that he cannot hear;" nor doth his affection for his aged servants lessen. It was a remarkable saying of Cardinal Wolsey, at the close of his life; "If I had served my God as long and as faithfully as I have served my prince, he would not have cast me off in my old age." Through all succeeding generations the Lord shall endure. This adds the strongest security to his promises and covenant, and is an encouragement to his people to hope in him, whatever changes and alterations there may be in the world about them; for "his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips." In this therefore you may rejoice, as the Psalmist doth, "This God is our God, for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." These are the reasons suggested in the text, why the aged servants of God should confide in his almighty and gracious care. He is their Maker, he hath been their supporter and benefactor hitherto, and he is an unchangeable God. Let me now add some reflections from the subject.

REFLECTIONS.

1. *How unreasonable and unbecoming it is for aged saints to sink under their burdens and infirmities!* Be they ever so many.

* Psalm cii. 27.

and great, you have the promise of God to depend upon, that he “will bear, and carry, and deliver” you. It is too common a case for Christ’s old disciples to grow sorrowful and dejected, and spend the conclusion of their lives in fretfulness and complaining; which renders them uneasy to themselves, doubles all their crosses, destroys all their comforts, and makes them burdensome to those about them. But this is a very unreasonable and unbecoming disposition; very dishonourable to God, whose goodness you have so long and largely tasted: it is very injurious to religion, of which you ought to be patrons and ornaments, and likely to prejudice others against it, as if, after a long trial, you had found it to be an uncomfortable, melancholy service. Suffer me to expostulate with you, fathers, on this head, to ask you, as Eliphaz did Job, “Are the consolations of God small with thee?”* Do all his good and comfortable words carry no meaning in them? Doth he intend to deceive his creatures, and even his children? Check, then, the first appearance of a complaining spirit; labour to keep up your courage, and maintain your cheerfulness. In order to this, have faith in God and his promises, especially that precious one which we have been contemplating. Plead it before God, and commit the keeping of your souls and the disposal of all your inferior concerns to him, as a faithful creator. When your heart is ready to be overwhelmed, and doubts and fears to get the better of your faith, recollect David’s observation, “I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.”† Recollect the long experience you have had of God’s care and kindness; and imitate Abraham, who, when a hundred years old, was “strong in faith,” and staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. “Fear not, for he will be with you; be not dismayed, for he is your God; he will strengthen you, yea, he will help you, yea, he will uphold you with the right hand of his righteousness.”‡ And may his Spirit help your infirmities, and strengthen your faith; and then you will find his promises your joy and song amidst your pilgrimage, and a cordial to support you, when flesh and heart faileth. In this circumstance I heartily wish your souls and mine may be in the same frame as that of a pious Scotch minister, who, being asked by a friend during his last illness, whether he thought himself dying, answered, “Really, friend, I care not whether I am or not; for if I die, I shall be with God, and if I live, he will be with me.”

2. *Aged saints are under great obligations to God, and should be faithful unto death.* You are under innumerable obligations to God as your creator, preserver, and benefactor; as the guide of your youth, and the stay of your advancing years. You are under the highest obligations to him for Christ and the promises;

* Job. x. 11.

† Psalm lxxvii. 10.

‡ Isa. xli. 10.

for all the operations of his grace upon your hearts, and all the displays of his love, faithfulness, and immutability. What then doth the Lord require of you, but that you "hold fast that which you have," and "go on to perfection?" If you expect these supports and consolations, proceed vigorously in the service of God; and let not your infirmities be made an excuse for negligence and sloth. It is your duty to "bring forth fruit in old age." Labour to maintain the seriousness and spirituality of your devotions, though your thoughts may not be so regular, nor your affections so lively, as they have been. Let your hoary heads never be spotted with any sin, but "found in the way of righteousness;" and then they will be "crowns of glory" to you. Consider what you can do for the honour of God and the interest of religion: how you can show your gratitude to God, and your love to the Lord Jesus Christ. If God giveth you strength and ability for active services, abound in them; for death is at hand. If you cannot glorify him by active services, labour to adorn and recommend religion, by patience and resignation to his will, and by quietly waiting for his salvation. Show to the rising generation the knowledge of God, his wonderful works for you, for your fathers, for his church; and be teachers of good things; that you leave a savour of religion, whenever you quit the stage. Thus, fathers, should your last days be employed, and then you will be useful even to the close of life. Thus will you finish your race with honour and joy, and through the riches of divine grace, receive a distinguished reward from the God whom you have faithfully served.

3. *Young persons should choose God, as the guide of their youth, if they desire that he should be the support and comfort of their age.* To you, who are young, our text speaks; and if you desire to have God for your friend and helper, amidst the temptations and sorrows of life, the decays of nature, and the attacks of death, you must secure an interest in him now, by repentance, and faith in the Redeemer; by devoting yourselves to his service, and spending your days in his fear. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before those evil days come, in which there is no pleasure;" no earthly pleasure: nothing but the pleasure of a good conscience, of reviewing a life spent in serving God, and a cheerful hope of approaching happiness. This will be the stay and staff of old age, and delight the soul, when nothing else can. If you desire this, let habits of serious lively devotion be contracted while young; a stock of religious qualities and dispositions laid up in the mind, that may be improved and strengthened as long as you live. But if you spend your youth in vanity and sin, in frolic and trifles, without habituating yourselves to devotion, self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness, what a miserable old age will you have of it! If the former part of your life hath been "vanity," the latter end

of it can be nothing but "vexation of spirit." The mind will be craving and restless ; it can neither look backward nor forward with pleasure, but will be full of uncleanness, spleen, and remorse ; dissatisfied with itself, and out of humour with every thing else. God will "write bitter things against you," and "make you to possess the iniquities of your youth."* Believe it, young friends, old age is a burden heavy enough of itself, without the stings of a guilty conscience, the reflection of having served divers lusts and pleasures, and the want of some pious, faithful, tender friends to lighten the burden. It will be sad indeed to have none to converse with in those circumstances, but God and your own conscience, and neither of them at peace with you. If you neglect religion now, habits of vice will be so fixed in the soul, that it will be very difficult, next to impossible, to root them out. Old age is a season of life "not very apt to learn, and much less apt to unlearn." Besides, is there not considerable reason to doubt, whether God will accept the dregs of your life, when the prime and vigour of it have been withheld from him ; yea, employed to affront him ? If you are ever so serious and good when you grow old, you can do comparatively little for God in those days of weakness and affliction. I remember to have read of an old man, who, being converted in the decline of life, ordered this to be inscribed on his tomb-stone, "Here lies an old man of seven years of age." So many years he had been religious ; and he reckoned that he had lived no longer than he had lived religiously ; and indeed, living in pleasure, or for worldly ends, is not living ; it is rather death.† I speak, you see, upon the presumption of your living to be old ; but can you depend on that, when "you know not what shall be on the morrow ?" "All flesh is grass." "All the glory of man," health, strength, beauty,—all fade. It is vain to talk of what you will do, and how good you will be, when you are old ; since this night your souls may be required of you. Make haste, then, and delay not to keep God's commandments. I conclude all with that solemn exhortation of Solomon, which suits persons of every age, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest."‡

* Job xiii. 26.

† 1 Tim. v. 6.

‡ Eccles. ix. 10.

DISCOURSE VII.

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS, AN EMBLEM OF
THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE ON EARTH.

NUMBERS x. 12.

And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.

THE apostle Paul observes, that the things which happened to Israel in the wilderness “happened to them for ensamples,” or types and patterns, “to us; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”* The sacred writers sometimes allude to their case; refer to their deliverance from Egypt as an emblem of the Christian's deliverance from the slavery of sin and Satan; and their entrance upon Canaan as an emblem of the heavenly state, which all the people of God shall possess. So that I think, my brethren, I am sufficiently justified in considering their journeys and stations in the wilderness as an emblem of the state of God's people, while they are passing through this world. This will give us a very natural and instructive idea of human life, and some important hints of caution and encouragement, particularly adapted to the circumstances of aged Christians.

After God had delivered Israel from Egypt, he appointed them to wander forty years in the wilderness; that he might punish their disobedience, cure them of the idolatry which they had been infected with in Egypt, give them time to learn the laws and ceremonies which he had enjoined them, and train them up, by subjection and discipline, for driving out the wicked Canaanites, whose land they were to possess. They had continued long near mount Sinai, where the law was given; and the text tells us, that “they took their journey out of the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud, which directed their march, rested in the wilderness of Paran,” where they were to encamp. This wilderness of Paran was a vast desert; it was eleven days' journey over; and most of their stations, though called by particular names, were in that wilderness.† So that we may naturally consider their state, during this period, as an emblem of the Christian's state while on earth. The subject of our discourse, therefore, will be this reflection, that

While we are in this world we are passing through a wilderness; and our removes in it are only from one wilderness to another.

The Christian is travelling from Egypt, from spiritual slavery, to the heavenly Canaan, and all his journey is through a wilderness. The men of this world will object to and dislike the comparison,

* 1 Cor. x. 11.

† Numb. xii. 16.

because the world is their portion, their all. But those whose chief business and governing desire is to get to heaven, and who have their conversation there, will acknowledge the emblem to be just, will dwell on it with pleasure, and derive instruction from it. The justice of this reflection will appear from seriously considering, that the present state is to the true Christian, on many accounts, an uncomfortable, a dangerous, and an unsettled state. This world is like a wilderness, as,

I. It is an uncomfortable state.

The wilderness was so to Israel, both on account of the inconveniences they met with in it, and the goodness of the country to which they were going, and where they desired and longed to be. The wilderness of Paran was a dry, sandy desert. It is called in scripture, "a terrible wilderness, a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death, a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt."* And travellers give us the same account of it. Such is earth to the people of God. Their state here is represented in scripture as a pilgrimage; they are "strangers and sojourners" on earth: "few and evil" are the days of their pilgrimage; yea, they are full of trouble. The temptations which surround them; the body of death which cleaves to them; sin and corruption that still dwell in them; are their greatest burdens, and make their journey toilsome. Afflictions and troubles of various kinds, too many to be reckoned up, are a painful exercise, from which they are seldom free. Bodily disorders hinder them from active service and comfortable enjoyment. Their disappointed hopes and expectations distress their minds and spoil their pleasure. The want of earthly enjoyments is their uneasiness, and oftentimes their reproach; and if they have much of the world, it is so far from making them happy, that it increaseth their cares and anxieties. They have many vexations from their fellow-travellers; from those of the same tribe; and sometimes from those of the same tent and family. They would be serviceable to others; but either have it not in their power, or others will not permit or receive their friendly attempts; and they often meet with base and ungrateful returns for real services. The darkness of their own minds, to which it is owing that they know so little of God, of Christ, of themselves, of religion, and a future state, is a grievance to them; and the imperfection of their own graces giveth them many sorrows of heart. They have various comforts indeed; but these have all some alloy or mixture. And the noblest pleasures they find on earth are not the natural growth of the soil; nor will any cultivation of art produce them; they are sent down immediately from heaven, as the manna was upon the Israelites; or drawn out of unlikely objects, by the provi-

* Jer. ii. 6.

dence or grace of God, as the water was fetched out of the rock for Israel. Through such a wilderness they are travelling, where painful circumstances are every day occurring. In this wilderness their carcasses must fall; for they are under the general sentence of mortality; and there is no hope that their case will be much better, till they are quite past it. This world is like a wilderness, for,

II. *It is a dangerous state:*

Dangerous to the Christian's virtue and peace, to the life and health of his soul, which are the main things that he regards and pursues. Israel found the wilderness of Paran dangerous, as well as uncomfortable; not only destitute of all suitable supplies, but beset with enemies. It is called "a waste howling wilderness,"* referring to the many ravenous beasts that prowled about it with hideous howling, and often destroyed the helpless travellers. It is also called "a great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions;"† and by these many of the Israelites were destroyed. They also met with some formidable human enemies; as Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan; and were destroyed by some of the allurements of Balaam and Balak. In this respect, it is a lively emblem of the case of the Christian while on earth. His virtue is in continual danger from many quarters. His own appetites and passions often lead him into sin. The pleasures of the wilderness, imperfect as they are, tend to seduce him from God and his duty; being suited to the lower part of his nature, and strongly recommended by the language and practice of others. He seldom goeth into company, but he is in some peril from it. He is in danger of being infected by the bad examples, customs, and manners of the age; which fashion sanctifies and enforces, against the authority and law of God. The allurements of the world are much more dangerous than its terrors; as Israel suffered more by Balaam's cursed advice to corrupt their principles and morals, than they could have done by Balak's hostile attack. In this wilderness there are many beasts of prey in human shape, who labour to corrupt innocence, and are glad to sully any worthy character. But the Christian hath not only flesh and blood to contend with, but principalities and powers. Satan, the old deceiver, watcheth to gain advantage over him; now he lies in wait like a serpent, that he may bite him unawares; now he "goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," and swallow up at once. Yea, he sometimes finds enemies among his friends, even in his own household, who would persuade him that he is too strict and scrupulous, or too active; and so would weaken his strength, lessen his zeal, and beguile him of his reward. He must feel the truth of an observation of Dr.

* Deut. xxxii. 10.

† Deut. viii. 15

Lucas; "It is not seldom seen, that the friends of our bosom are the greatest enemies of our souls." In short, his whole life is a state of warfare; he must carry on the combat against numerous enemies through life, and endure to the end. Once more,

III. *It is an unsettled state; subject to continual changes and alterations.*

Israel removed from the wilderness of Sinai to the wilderness of Paran. Though they journeyed from place to place, still it was in the wilderness. Thus all our removes and changes, though we expect they will be for the better, are only from one wilderness to another. This may be illustrated by observing, that we move from one age to another, from one place to another, from one condition to another; but still it is in a wilderness, and care and trouble will attend us in every remove.

1. We are moving from one age to another; and each is a wilderness. "Childhood and youth are vanity," generally spent in that which is insignificant and unprofitable; and there are few circumstances in that period which give us pleasure in the reflection. There is an Eastern proverb which saith, "The remembrance of youth is a sigh." When we properly enter upon life, cares and anxieties seize upon us; and we eagerly engage in some pursuits which in riper years we see to have been foolish. We promise ourselves much from the next stage; that we shall have got into a good track of business; that our work will be easy and our success sure; and that this, with the pleasure of increasing connexions and a growing family, will overbalance our cares. But we find that we have only got further into the wilderness; and sometimes say with Job, "Oh that I were as in the days of my youth!"* We then please ourselves with the hope that we shall enjoy repose in the advance of life, and that those who have been long our care, will comfort us after all our toil and labour. But some circumstance or other often ariseth to destroy or lessen the comfort we expected. Perhaps the capacity for relishing what we have gained is almost gone, and our former activity and vivacity are lost. Then come on "the evil days" in which we say, "There is no pleasure." The road becomes more burdensome than ever, so that we can hardly drag the poor remains of life along it; and the aged, with all their infirmities, have sometimes the mortification to see their youngers weary of them. Every age hath its peculiar cares and burdens, and, as Moses saith of Israel in the wilderness, "we spend our years as a tale that is told."† Further,

2. We are sometimes moving from one place to another. There are few persons but have, in the course of their lives, been removed from one town and settlement to another. Sometimes the providence of God directs us to change our place, as the

* Job xxix. 4.

† Ps. xc. 9.

cloud pointed out the motions and stations of the camp of Israel. We are naturally fond of the place of our birth, or the place where we have spent our youth, or been for any time fixed; use hath reconciled us to the inconveniences of it, and even turned some of them into pleasures. Old acquaintance and connexions are agreeable; and we are ready to say with Job, "I shall die in my nest,"* and expect to be buried among our own people. But Providence moves us to some distant settlement. Perhaps disappointment in our business and schemes obligeth us to seek another sphere of action, by which our youthful intimacies are broken off. Or, if we continue on the same spot, our friends are removed; and whole families that we loved, and with whom we took sweet counsel together, are scattered. It sometimes happens, that persons are scarcely fixed in a new station, and got over the difficulty and trouble of a remove, but a rout, as it is called, comes; an order from heaven to decamp, and they must march away to another place. Some unforeseen, unexpected inconveniences spring up, where we intended to fix for life, and oblige us to think of another station. Perhaps Providence leadeth us into trouble, because we are too secure in our peace, and not sufficiently thankful for it. Some persons, after they have been hurried and vexed with worldly cares and perplexities, get to a more solitary station, and hope to spend the rest of their days in quiet; and then they are forced back again into the hurries of the world. There are many who quit their place and calling without need, and go contrary to the plainest intimations of Providence; they are never easy long in any place; never long pleased with any business or connexions; thus they multiply their own troubles. There are different cares and sorrows in different places; but cares and sorrows are the growth of every place; for every place is a wilderness. Men fly from serpents, and get among scorpions; and change a sandy desert for a marshy one. So that we may acknowledge the justice of that saying of an ancient, "Wherever thou goest, crosses will follow thee; for whcrever thou goest thou carriest thyself with thee." Further,

2. *We are changing from one condition to another.* The state of our affairs, our bodies, and our connexions, is continually changing. Men's worldly circumstances rise and fall; they are brought low; they are exalted; they go out full, and return empty, and the world smiles upon them again. But riches are oftentimes as troublesome as poverty, and bring more temptations, cares, and vexations with them. We expect perhaps to be easy and happy in some new habitation; and after much pains and expense to make it handsome and convenient, we find that no walls will keep out trouble, and no ornaments secure perpetual ease and quiet of mind. Health and sickness, as

* Job xxix. 18.

well as prosperity and adversity, are set one against the other. We sometimes groan under acute pain, or languish with pining sickness. When health and ease are restored, some new disorder soon attacks us ; or if we continue vigorous and cheerful for a long time together, we begin to see that there is some truth in the poet's words, that "health for want of change becomes disease." We enter on new relations in life, and promise ourselves much from them : but still it is a wilderness : if we have new pleasures, we have new cares and sorrows ; and if we double our joys, we double our griefs too. In every stage of the wilderness, we leave some of our relations and friends behind us, the prey of the great and universal destroyer, Death : and we find the rest of the journey more tiresome and dangerous, for want of their assistance and company. Some are confined long in the wilderness, beyond the usual period of human life. Sometimes they think themselves near the country for which they are bound ; and then, like Israel, they are turned back again, and have many more years to wander. Their burdens grow heavier, and their pleasures less ; and nothing in the wilderness can support them : nothing but religion, and the hope of getting to Canaan at last.

This, my brethren, is the state of mankind, even of good men : yea, the best of men, with regard to many of these things, fare as others do, as Moses and Aaron suffered with their rebellious brethren. Those who are got but a little way into the wilderness may think the representation strained. They have my best wishes they may find it so ; and that their journey may be as pleasant as is consistent with their end being peace. But I believe the experience of most persons, especially of the aged, confirms what I have been saying. And I heartily pray that it may dispose us to receive those useful instructions which this idea of human life suggests, and which it is my business now to recommend to you.

APPLICATION.

1. *Let us be thankful that we have so many comforts in the wilderness.* Far be it from me to suggest that it is all gloomy and dreary. The wilderness was not so to Israel. They met with many pleasant spots ; some palm trees and wells of water.* They had Moses and Aaron with them ; were well guided and guarded, and fed and clothed. Their posterity were often reminded of God's favours to their fathers there, and thankfully acknowledged them. So, at a solemn fast kept in Nehemiah's time, the Levites acknowledged, "Thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness : the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way ; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go : yea, forty years didst thou sustain them

* Exod. xv. 27.

in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing.”* And this, blessed be God, is our case. He giveth us bread to eat, and raiment to put on. We are not indeed fed and clothed by miracle, yet we are by providence; and this thought is to a pious mind very delightful. God crowneth the year with his goodness. Our connexions with one another are a source of daily pleasure. Our compassionate feelings, social affections, and meetings and friendly offices, take off the burdensomeness of the way. We have, as it were, Moses with us, as a lawgiver and governor; we are not exposed to savage, arbitrary power, but have our liberties fenced about with good laws. We have God’s word to be our guide and comfort. We have the heavenly manna; that bread from heaven, of which, whosoever eateth, will not only enjoy present nourishment and delight, but live for ever. The Israelites drank of the rock that followed them, “and that rock was Christ;”† typical of the spiritual blessings he bestowed on his people, to refresh them in their travels through the wilderness. God giveth us also, as he did to them in the wilderness, “his good Spirit to instruct us.”‡ We have Aaron with us; the Lord’s priests and ministers, to preside over our religious assemblies. We have days of holy rest, and solemn feasts, and various exercises and ordinances, to strengthen and revive our hearts: and “with joy we may draw water out of these wells of salvation.” To which I may add, that God is pleased sometimes to favour his servants with some foretastes and earnest of the happiness of the heavenly country, to increase their desires of it; as Israel tasted of the fruits of Canaan in the desert.§ Hitherto hath the Lord borne us up in the wilderness; and it becomes us to remember all the way he hath led us, that we may be thankful unto him and bless his name. “Let the wilderness lift up its voice, and the inhabitants thereof give glory unto the Lord.”||

2. *Let us be patient and contented under the evils of it.* And for this plain reason; because it is sin that hath turned the world into a wilderness. Why was Israel condemned to wander into the great and terrible wilderness, but because they were a perverse and rebellious people, who tempted and provoked the most High? Sin has spoiled the beauty and blasted the glory of the creation. Amidst all our sufferings, we are only feeling the natural consequences or just punishment of sin; and this wilderness is much more comfortable than our iniquities deserve. Let us further consider, that some of the evils of it are wisely and kindly allotted to us, to prevent our being too fond of it, and seeking rest and happiness in it, short of Canaan: and we read God’s merciful intention towards us, in what was said to Israel; “He led thee through the great and terrible wilderness, that he might humble thee and prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end;”¶ to discipline and train thee for a happy settlement in the

* Neh. ix. 19—21.

† 1 Cor. x. 4.

‡ Neh. ix. 20.

§ Numb. xiii. 23, &c.

|| Isa. xlii. 11.

¶ Deut. viii. 16.

heavenly country. Let us then expect trouble ; never raise our expectations too high from, nor be too fond of, any place, habitation, circumstance, or connexion ; for the more we expect from the world, the more shall we be disappointed. This caution is especially necessary for youth. Let us never look for a complete or a durable happiness here. When troubles come, let us guard our hearts, that they be not impatient and rebellious against God. It was monstrous conduct in Israel, to “ provoke the most High in the wilderness,” where they were suffering for their sins. “ Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.” To prevent this, think of the goodness and mercy that follow you in every stage and circumstance. And especially “ look unto Jesus,” who spent so many years in this wilderness ; and having left his original glory, and being perfectly holy, felt more from its inconveniences than we do. He hath traversed the desert before you, and left behind the print of his feet. In the way in which Christ hath gone, never complain ; and if the path be rough, consider your Fore-runner. Do not be impatient because the journey is long and tedious. Remember what the Psalmist saith of Israel’s march through the wilderness ; “ He led them forth by the right way.”* Though it was round about and uncomfortable, it was still “ the right way.” God always leads his people the right way, the best way to their heavenly habitation, though it may not seem to them the nearest and most comfortable : and therefore, instead of murmuring, they ought to “ go on their way rejoicing.”

3. *Let us earnestly seek and hope for the presence of God with us in this wilderness ; and that will be every thing to us.* It was the honour and happiness of Israel, that to them pertained “ the glory ;”† the shining cloud, that was a symbol or emblem of the divine presence with them : this went before them in their journeys, and rested, as the text tells us, in the wilderness of Paran. This cloud attended them by day to direct their motions, screening them from the heat of the sun in those sandy lands ; and it appeared as a pillar of fire by night, to cast a light and warmth about them ; and it might also terrify and keep off wild beasts. We are not to expect any such sensible manifestations of the divine presence with us ; but we have many gracious promises, that God will guide and defend his people ; that “ if in all our ways we acknowledge him, he will direct our paths ;” that he will “ order the steps of good men ;” that they shall be “ led by his Spirit ;” that he will be “ a sun and shield” to them. And it is observable, that these promises are often made in figurative expressions, taken from the cloud of glory in the wilderness ; particularly Isaiah saith, “ The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Sion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and a smoke by day,

* Psalm cvii. 7.

† Rom. ix. 4.

and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence.”* Let us therefore daily ask his presence, guidance, and defence; commit ourselves to his care, and follow the leadings of his providence; for nothing can be more comfortable than to see God, as it were, going before us in our affairs and settlements, and especially our important changes in life. Let us look to him to guard us from every enemy; especially from the fiery serpent, that would poison and destroy our souls. His help is to be obtained by living near to him in the exercises of faith and devotion. And if we have the light of his countenance with us, it will make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord.

4. *Let us rejoice in the views of the heavenly Canaan, and diligently prepare for it.* “We,” saith the apostle, “who have believed, do enter into rest; for to us the good tidings of rest are preached as well as to them, even a rest that remaineth to the people of God.”† We are now in the wilderness, but there is a “better country, even a heavenly one,” before us, to which we are travelling. This is uncomfortable; but there is no want, no inconvenience, no sin, no sorrow there. This is dangerous; but no enemy shall come near that sacred abode; Satan and wicked men are for ever banished from it, no more to tempt or terrify the people of God. This is unsettled; but there his Israel find a settled rest, and shall be made “pillars in the house of God, to go out no more.” That state is subject to no changes, but from better to better; from one degree of happiness to another. Let us be thankful, my brethren, that such a rest and such a state is revealed and promised to us, that we are not to live always, not to wander endlessly in this wilderness. We may, by reading the word and mixing faith with it, view “the good land” which God intends for our everlasting portion; and see something of the length and breadth, the business and felicity of it. But let us, as the apostle exhorts, “fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should come short of it.” “Let us labour to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” as the Israelites. “With many of them God was displeased, and they were overthrown in the wilderness,” and never entered Canaan. Wherefore, “let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” Let us not “lust after evil things, as they lusted;” nor be covetous and eager in our desires of earthly enjoyments; for God may, as in this case, “grant our request, and send leanness into our souls.”‡ Let us not idolize this world, nor indulge any criminal passions, nor “tempt Christ,” lest we be destroyed as they were. Let our conversation be in heaven; and let the believing views of it reconcile us to this wearisome pilgrimage, and comfort us under all our sorrows.

* Isa. iv. 5.

† Heb. iv. 2, &c.

‡ Psalm cvi. 15.

A few stages more and we shall make a final remove to the heavenly land, of which it may be said more truly than of Canaan, that it is "the glory of all lands."* Indeed Jordan is in the way, death's cold flood divideth this good land from the wilderness. But that God, who hath led us hitherto, and is our God for ever, will be our guide unto death, and through it, and make our passage safe and comfortable. And when we are once got through it, all sorrows, dangers, and fears are for ever over. All our wants will be supplied, and all our desires and hopes infinitely exceeded. There we shall see reason to acknowledge, as a holy man did just before he expired, that "he believed he could not have gone to heaven without every affliction which he had endured." Come on, then, my fellow pilgrims, and let not our souls, like Israel's, be "discouraged because of the way;"† but "give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: to him who leadeth his people through the wilderness; for his mercy endureth for ever."‡ Amen.

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE INWARD MAN RENEWED, AMIDST THE DECAYS OF THE
OUTWARD MAN.

2 CORINTHIANS IV. 16.

*For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish,
yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*

ST. Paul frequently represents his own sufferings as intended for the benefit of the Christian church, and in this view his benevolent heart rejoiced in them. Accordingly, having in this chapter given the Corinthians an account of the troubles and afflictions he endured, he adds, in the verse before the text, "All things are for your sakes." It supported his mind under all his distresses, to think that they were intended for the honour of Christianity, and for the encouragement of his fellow-Christians under their sufferings. And his expectation of their subserving these important purposes was abundantly answered. Not only his contemporaries, but the Christian church in all succeeding ages, have received much benefit by them; yea, the history he gives of the temper of his mind under them, and the advantages which he gained by them, is a standing lesson to us. It teaches us to aspire after the same temper, and, in so doing, to hope for the same comfort and advantage by the afflictions which are allotted to us. Our text is, in this view, particularly instructive; instructive to all, especially to aged Christians, and those who are labouring under bodily pains and

* Ezek. xx. 6.

† Numb. xxi. 4.

‡ Psalm cxxxvi. 1—16.

infirmities. For the illustration of the words, and stating the apostle's temper, let me consider and recommend to your regard,

I. The view here given of human nature, as consisting of an outward and inward man.

II. The manner in which each part of it was affected ; the one perishing ; the other strengthening, instead of fainting.

III. The ground of the apostle's happy experience on this head ; "For which cause we faint not." I am to consider,

I. The view here given of human nature.

It consists of an outward and an inward man. An elegant and useful description, on which account I choose just to mention it. In strict propriety of speech, both these together constitute the man ; but the apostle distinguisheth between them, in order more clearly to describe what he experienced ; and it would be well for us, if we were more careful to distinguish between them in our sentiments and conduct. By "our outward man," or as some would render the original, "the man that is without us," he means the body with its several parts, limbs and senses, composed of matter and capable of being divided and destroyed. This is the covering of the soul ; the house or tent in which it dwells. And the expression may intimate the small regard he paid to the body compared with its inhabitant—the outward man, that which we hardly look upon as part of ourselves ! By "the inward man," the man that dwells in the body and is out of sight, he means the soul with all its powers and faculties. Thus it is said in Job, "There is a spirit in man," a rational, immortal spirit. So we read of giving up the spirit, and of the departure of the soul at death. The phrases in the text were used by the most celebrated of the heathen philosophers, and they sometimes call the soul "the man within the man." This plainly expresseth the apostle's belief of his being something more than body, of having a soul quite different and distinct from the animal frame. But I need not enlarge here. Let us consider,

II. The different manner in which each of these was affected. The outward man was growing weaker ; the inward man growing stronger continually, instead of fainting.

1. The outward man was perishing. The apostle doth not so much refer to the death of the body as to its preceding decay. And the word might have been rendered, more agreeably to the original and the apostle's design, "Our outward man decayeth or is perishing ;" it is every day growing weaker and weaker. This may refer in part to the natural decay of the body in advancing years. Human life is confined within narrow limits. The limbs and senses of the body, its various organs and powers, gradually wear out ; and notwithstanding all the care we can take of it, it daily approacheth nearer to its dissolution. Sometimes it perish-

eth by diseases and accidents, which in a few days or hours destroy its strength and vigour, and put an end to all its capacity of motion and action. But the apostle seems to have a particular reference to those decays of his outward man, which were occasioned by the station and circumstances in which he was placed. His necessary studies and labours as a Christian minister and apostle would greatly impair it; especially as he seems not to have been a robust man, but subject to some nervous complaints, which occasioned "his bodily presence" to be "weak, and his speech" stammering and "contemptible." This he calls his "infirmity in the flesh." St. Paul knew by experience, that to think closely is to labour; to speak long in public large assemblies, is to labour; and that these affect the outward man more than the labour of the hands. Besides this he had many peculiar difficulties and hardships to go through; arising from the persecution he met with from the bigoted Jews and gentiles, and some enemies calling themselves Christians. He was driven from place to place, enduring a great many fatigues and perils in his travelling, being often badly accommodated, and sometimes in want of all things. These things would increase the natural decays of the body, and hurry it the sooner to its dissolution. Accordingly he observes in this chapter, "We which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake." And again, "Death worketh in us;"* it is continually working, undermining this earthly tabernacle, and will soon bring it to the dust. A disagreeable situation to be in! So most men think when they are pained, weak, and languishing. But not so bad neither, intimates the apostle, as one would at first apprehend; for,

2. The inward man, the soul, is renewed day by day. It grows stronger and stronger. Though all its powers may sometimes seem exhausted, and quite disabled by difficulties and temptations, yet it gains fresh recruits; yea, it is made better by bodily infirmities and sufferings. It deriveth vigour from the decay of the body; and its strength grows in proportion as that perisheth. It advanceth in knowledge and experience; for tribulation, as he elsewhere observes, "worketh patience, and patience experience." It grows more established in virtue and goodness. Its diligence is quickened and its zeal promoted by bodily weaknesses; as they intimate that the time of working is short. It increaseth in steadiness from tasting largely the pleasures of religion, and feeling the good effects of faith, watchfulness, and prayer. And as these bodily decays intimate the speedy approach of complete happiness, we are revived and animated by the prospect of it. This effect is also expressed in the beginning of the verse, "We faint not;" of which the expression of "the inward man being renewed" is an illustration.

* Verses 11, 12.

We are not disheartened or discouraged from doing our duty, by these infirmities; we do not sink into sloth and despondency, because we feel decays, and are less able to pursue our labours, and struggle with difficulties, than formerly; no, but we go on with all the vigour we can exert, and are determined not to decline the glorious work, nor give up the honourable conflict, while we are capable of sustaining it. The strength of the inward man supports the outward, and that strength is "renewed day by day;" every day we make some progress in our Christian course and go from strength to strength. Happy man indeed, that had such resolution and activity amidst such infirmities and discouragements! But to what was this owing? What renewed and strengthened the inward man under such difficulties? This I am to consider under the next particular, which is,

III. *The ground of the apostle's happy experience on this head.*

It is intimated in the text, in those words, "For which cause;" and naturally directs our thoughts to the context. Now it appears that the verse before the text comes in by way of parenthesis, and therefore we must look to the foregoing verse; there the apostle expresseth his full assurance that he should be raised from the dead by Jesus Christ, and presented with the believing Corinthians before the presence of his glory; and he pursues the delightful thought in the verses following the text, to the close of the chapter, and through a great part of the next. So that, comparing these verses with the text, it appears that what occasioned this resolution, courage, and progressive goodness in the apostle's heart, was hope; the lively hope of a resurrection from the dead and a blessed immortality; or, in his own most emphatical words in the next verse, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." For the illustration of this we may observe, that the object of the apostle's hope was substantial good, yea the greatest good he could possibly receive. It was not fixed on earthly things, the recovery of perfect health, and freedom from trouble and persecution, but on complete rest, holiness, and happiness, in the future state. And the apostle's hope was well grounded. A precarious hope preys upon the spirit and weakens it. A state of doubt and uncertainty is painful, in proportion to the greatness and excellency of the object desired. But the apostle had made such attainments in religion, and had such communications of the Spirit, as to arrive at a full assurance of hope. A well-grounded hope, though it should not rise so high as the apostle's, is sufficient to strengthen the soul whether it suffers with or from the body. Hope is a spur to action; it purifies the heart, cherisheth love and gratitude to God and the Redeemer, for raising us to it; and these are the noblest springs of obedience. It "maketh not ashamed," that is, it establisheth and delights the heart under its various burdens. It

keeps up the spirits under the languor and decays of nature. Indeed it is so necessary a grace, that the soul could not subsist without it, while the object is absent; while the happiness it expects is unseen, and at a distance. Without it our graces would languish and die; there would be scarce any thing to excite us to labour and activity, or to encourage us to patience and perseverance under sufferings. Hope doth, as it were, confirm the certainty and excellency of future happiness, as it is built on the promises of God, and expects something worthy of God. To this it must be added, that the hope of the apostle and of every sincere Christian is wrought and supported by the Spirit of God. The soul is made to "abound in hope" by the power of the Holy Ghost;" and on these accounts it produceth so noble an effect. This was the great support of the apostle's mind, under all the infirmities of the outward man; even the hope of the glorious resurrection of his vile dying body, and the complete happiness of his immortal spirit.

APPLICATION.

1. *We learn that the gospel is a great blessing to the world.* "Man that is born of a woman is but of few days, and they are full of trouble." Before we arrive at old age, many infirmities generally attack us, and sometimes make our lives almost a burden. Our kind Father has sent us a cordial from heaven, even the everlasting gospel. Though it doth not remove the sentence of death consequent upon sin, nor free us from the pains and decays to which sin hath exposed our bodies; yet it supports and cheers the soul under them, and reconciles it to the thoughts of death. Yea it makes what is so disagreeable to nature the means of improving and strengthening our better part, and promoting its eternal interests. Let this engage us to bless God for the gospel, which "brings life and immortality to light." It is fit you should be frequently reminded of this, as the peculiar excellency of the gospel, and what calls for our daily thankfulness. In it we have the clearest discoveries of the nature of heaven, of its glory and the duration of it. "We are begotten again to this lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead;" the hope of a happiness which will fully satisfy the desires of the inward man. There is honour and splendour also for the outward; the inferior part is not forgotten in the plan of divine love. "And this hope we have, as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast," amidst all the storms that may beat upon us in our passage through life. Christ rose, ascended, and was then glorified. And his faithful followers, whatever they suffer, shall at length be raised, exalted, and glorified with him. Let it excite our thankfulness also, that we have in the New Testament the experience of the holy apostles so particularly recorded, who endured a great fight of affliction, and went through much tri-

bulation. In their temper and behaviour we see what patience, cheerfulness, and courage, hope can inspire. And while their example doth honour to that religion which they were employed to propagate, and show its superior excellence to all others, it is also recorded for our admonition and encouragement; and the admonition is so necessary, and the encouragement so strong and delightful, that it demands our continued gratitude to God, who hath given us his word, and therein assured, and by happy experience and delightful foretaste often convinced, his servants, "that the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed."

2. *It is the duty of every one to take the greatest care of the inward man; and be principally concerned about its welfare.* Man is a creature of a wonderful composition; made up of body and spirit; each of which demands a proper care. But the spirit, the nobler part of our nature, undoubtedly demands our greatest care. This is plain and evident. But how few act upon this conviction! We all know that we have another interest to be concerned about besides that of the flesh. It is certainly our duty to provide food and raiment for the outward man; to guard it from injuries; to repair its decays; and to keep it habitable as long as we can. But the care of the soul is of the last importance, and, indeed, the "one thing needful." What signify all our pains to support and adorn the outward man, while the "hidden man of the heart" is neglected; while little or no pains are taken to support it with good principles, and adorn it with holy dispositions? Many things that contribute to the pleasure and gratification of the outward man, frequently hurt the inward man; therefore the interest of the body should be always sacrificed to the good of the soul. Let us not be solicitous to inquire how we shall secure the outward man, and have all well with that, as how to secure the well-being of the immortal spirit. The outward man will perish; it will decay and die, and there is no remedy for it. But the inward man will survive. When the earthly house of this tabernacle in which the soul dwells is dissolved, the inhabitants will remove to endless joy or woe. It becomes every one seriously to think of this. If the soul is neglected, impoverished, and starved, it must be miserable when it quits the body. And all the pain and agony which the outward man ever felt, will appear light and trifling, compared with the pain and agony of the spirit when it is punished with everlasting destruction. If the care of the soul is neglected, "what will you do in the day of evil," when the outward man utterly perisheth? There is not, there cannot be, a more miserable creature on earth than a man who has lost his health, is much pained, languishing and dying, and yet hath no peace of conscience, no solid hope. He cannot live, and yet would; because he dares not die.* Awake, then, my

* See a dreadful instance of this in Jehoram, 2 Chron. xxi. 12—20.

friends, and labour immediately to secure a well grounded hope. In order to that, hope for nothing but what God hath promised. The great thing he hath promised is eternal life; and the promise is made only to those who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for it, and fix their dependence on Christ as their hope.

3. *It should be the concern of every sincere Christian to strengthen his hope*, that it may be more active and lively, such as he may live upon when the body is sick and languishing. A weak and fluctuating hope is the great cause of our small attainments in religion, and the little zeal we show to make progress in piety, and do good to the souls of others. Let it be your desire and endeavour that "the inward man may be renewed day by day;" that you may be every day growing in grace; adding something to your stock of knowledge, Christian experience, and comfort. In order to this, endeavour to live more by faith. Faith fetcheth in, as it were, that provision on which hope feeds, and which supports and strengthens the divine life. Meditate much on the joys of heaven: it is a copious, delightful, and edifying subject, and will lead you more clearly to discern how little attention the body deserveth compared with the never-dying soul. To this end, also, "let prayer be your daily business;" and particularly seek further measures of the Spirit to improve your graces; to raise you above an undue regard to the concerns of time and the outward man; and to seal you to the day of redemption. The ordinances of the gospel are well adapted to confirm the soul in every thing that is good, and promote its growth in grace. "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."* On the other hand, the love of the world and inordinate fears and cares about it, will distract the mind; and, if they do not quite draw aside from the way of glory, will slacken its pace and weaken its hope. "Hold fast, therefore, your hope without wavering, for he is faithful who hath promised."

4. *Let the aged and infirm be careful not to faint under their afflictions*. Weakness, disorder, and pain of body are not in themselves desirable; "they are not joyous, but grievous." But God, the Father of our spirits, intends to improve and strengthen the soul by them; therefore they should be patiently and cheerfully submitted to. Labour, ye children of affliction, to keep up your courage, and look well to the frame of your spirits. Let not the infirmities of your constitutions prevent your taking pains with your hearts to keep them near to God, and strengthen every good disposition and habit in them. Let not these be an excuse for neglecting the house and worship of God, when they are not extreme; or for indulging indolence and inactivity: for you will find religion and the service of God not

* Isaiah xl. 31.

only the strength of the soul, but of the outward man too, by promoting the composure and cheerfulness of the spirit. Be not always poring upon your infirmities and complaining of them; but see that all be right in the inward man. Nourish it up with the bread of life; apply by faith to the blood of sprinkling, and the grace of the Spirit, more completely to heal all its disorders and more fully to establish its health. Observe and study the temper of the holy apostle. Take notice with what little concern he speaks of his afflictions and decays. His language in effect is, "If the outward man must perish, let it perish; I am not solicitous about that. If this tabernacle must come down, let it come down. What is this to me, since the inward man is strengthening and improving daily; since my hope grows more strong and lively?"* Nor was such holy courage and indifference about the state and concerns of the outward man peculiar to St. Paul as an apostle. Other Christians have manifested a like temper. When that pious and laborious minister, Mr. Joseph Alleine, had been long confined to his bed by a painful disorder which deprived him of the use of all his limbs, he was asked by one of his friends "how he could be content to lie so long in that condition?" To which he answered, "What? Is God my Father, Christ my Saviour, and heaven my inheritance, and shall I not be content without health and limbs? He is an unreasonable wretch who cannot be content with a God, though he hath nothing else." It ought to be your great ambition, my suffering fellow-Christians, to attain such a temper as this; and in proportion as it prevails in your hearts, you may welcome your infirmities as the forerunners of eternal health. A few pains and struggles more, and the outward man will be put off with all its aches and sorrows; and the inward man will appear in all its vigour; without a cloud upon any of its faculties, a clog upon any of its operations, or an allay to any of its enjoyments. A soul that hath this hope may rejoice, even in the views of death. Holy Mr. Baxter, who had not enjoyed a waking hour free from pain and sickness for many years, when he was asked, just before he expired, how he did, answered, "Almost well." It is my earnest prayer for you who are aged and infirm, that God would "strengthen you with all might, by his Spirit, in the inner man,* unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness;" and then, "when flesh and heart fail, he will be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever." Amen.

* Howe.

† Eph. iii. 16.

DISCOURSE IX.

JACOB'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE DIVINE CARE, AND BLESSING
HIS GRANDCHILDREN, CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED TO
THE IMITATION OF AGED CHRISTIANS.

GENESIS XLVIII. 15, 16.

And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac: and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

THE text presents us with a very affecting scene; the patriarch Jacob blessing his grandchildren, the children of his beloved son Joseph, whom he never expected to have seen alive, much less governor of the land of Egypt. The good old man was now about a hundred and forty years of age, and so weak that he could not sit upright; yet his piety towards God, and his affection to his posterity, continued warm and strong even to the last. There is something very tender and solemn in this transaction which I propose now to consider; as it will suggest some hints of instruction to all, especially to you, my aged and honoured friends, whom I would now respectfully address and entreat. I shall,

I. Illustrate the words, and

II. Consider what lessons of instruction aged Christians may draw from them. I am,

I. *To illustrate the text.*

And here are two things observable. Jacob's recollection and acknowledgment of the divine goodness and care; and his prayer for his descendants.

1. Here is Jacob's recollection and acknowledgment of the divine goodness and care. He acknowledgeth God as the God of his pious ancestors, and as his constant preserver and benefactor. He acknowledgeth God as the God of his pious ancestors. "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk." An instructive phrase; intimating that they believed in and worshipped Jehovah, the living and true God; were in a state of friendship with him, and made it the business of their lives to act as in his presence, and in all things to serve and please him. It was an instance of divine goodness to him, that he was descended from such pious ancestors; and it gave him pleasure to recollect their piety. He also acknowledgeth God as his constant benefactor; "He hath fed me all my life long unto this day;" not now and then when difficulties occurred, but every

day; ever since I had a being, as the original is; before I was capable of thinking or contriving for myself. He looks beyond all second causes to God, as the author of all the conveniences and comforts which he had enjoyed through so long a series of years. He acknowledgeth God as his constant preserver; "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." Angels, appearing in a visible form, were often the medium of divine manifestations and instruments of conveying divine favours to the patriarchs. We read of several instances of angels appearing to Jacob. Though he had known a great deal of hardship, and experienced many dangers, alarms, and fears, yet he had been carried through all. He doth not ascribe his deliverance to his own prudence or courage, but to the care of God, and the guardianship of those angels whom he employed to defend him. God had kept him from many calamities; carried him through many difficulties; and several of those events, which appeared at first to be great and remediless evils, he found had been kindly intended and overruled for good, especially the slavery of Joseph.

2. Here is Jacob's prayer for his grand-children. He blessed Joseph; either himself, besides his children; or in his children. He laid his hand on them and prayed that God would bless them. Laying the hands on a person prayed for was a very ancient custom; a proper form of marking out the person, and testifying the earnestness of desire in him who blessed him. He prayed that God would bless them: an extensive phrase; comprehending all prosperity both of body and soul. He expresseth his wish that God would make them blessed or happy persons: particularly that they might enjoy temporal prosperity; that "his name might be named upon them;" that they might be called the sons of Jacob, be heads of distinct tribes, and share with his immediate children in the inheritance of the good land; that their families might be prosperous and flourishing, enjoy the same preservation and protection as he had done, and "grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." He prayed also that they might enjoy spiritual blessings. This is comprehended in the general phrase, "bless them;" and is implied in that expression, "Let the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac be named upon them;" as if he had said, May the gracious covenant which God made with Abraham, and confirmed to Isaac and me, be entailed on them; that covenant which extends to, and includes the Messiah, and all the spiritual blessings of his kingdom, especially eternal life! May the Lord be a God to them and their seed in every generation! may the entail of religion be kept up in their families! May they behave worthy their relation to Abraham and Isaac, and support the worship and service of the Lord God Almighty, amidst a corrupt and idolatrous world! This may suffice for the illustration of the text. I proceed,

II. *To consider what instructive lessons aged Christians may draw from hence.*

And they are chiefly these two. It is their duty to recollect and acknowledge their long experience of God's goodness and care, and to bless and pray for their descendants.

1. It is their duty to recollect and acknowledge their long experience of God's goodness and care. It was a precept of the law of Moses, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee forty years in the wilderness."* And it suggests to us, that it is the duty of all to remember the kind and favourable conduct of Providence to them. It is peculiarly the duty of aged Christians, who have travelled so many years in this wilderness, and had so long experience of divine protection and favour. Let me therefore entreat you, fathers, to recollect the goodness of God to you, and make mention of his loving-kindness: particularly acknowledge, after the example of Jacob, his goodness in your descent from pious ancestors, if that be the case; the privileges of your birth and education; the piety and zeal of your fathers; the good instructions you have received from them, and the good examples you have seen in them. Adore that God, who hath so graciously fixed your lot, and taught you from your youth up. Acknowledge his goodness, in providing a supply for all your wants. Think of the several stages of your journey through life, since you hung upon the breast; your passage through infancy, childhood, manhood, even to old age. Recollect the mercy that hath followed you every day and every hour; in every place, relation, settlement, and circumstance of life. You needed daily food, and a large stock of God's creatures have been consumed in supporting you for sixty or seventy years. This supply he hath given you; yea, many of the comforts and pleasures of life too, and indulged every reasonable appetite. The care of your parents, relations, and friends, was no other than the care of God. Your wisdom in contriving, your health and diligence in labouring for your own and your families' support, came from God; and his blessing prospered your labours. Look beyond all means and instruments to him who hath daily loaded you with his benefits. Again, recollect his goodness "in preserving and redeeming you from all evil." He hath delivered you from many evils, which you have felt or feared, through the guardianship of angels, the care of your fellow-creatures, or your own prudence and strength; all which are to be ascribed to his providence. Yea, he hath redeemed you from many unseen dangers, to which you have been exposed. He hath raised you up from many threatening disorders, prevented many fatal accidents, and prolonged your life beyond what you have expected. He hath often overruled some very grievous occurrences for your

* Deut. viii. 2.

real lasting good; and made your mercies doubly sweet by a short suspension of them, or your fear of losing them. Recollect also his goodness in raising you up friends; some unexpected ones, perhaps among strangers, to guide your giddy, unexperienced youth; to warn you of dangers, and advise and assist you in emergencies. By these or other means, he hath delivered you out of great and pressing difficulties, being better to you than your fears; brightened your gloomy prospects, and caused good to come out of evil, as in the case of Jacob. Recollect especially his kindness to your souls, in delivering you from the worst evils; from being corrupted by bad examples and an ensnaring world; from being ruined by the devices of Satan, and the deceitfulness of sin. He hath blessed you with many spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus; not only granted you restraining grace, and, I hope, begotten you by his Spirit to a new and divine life, but made ample provision for feeding your souls, promoting your spiritual health, and nourishing Christian graces in your hearts. Every degree of knowledge and holiness which you possess, all the peace and comfort that you have experienced, and are now experiencing, are from God; from the rules, examples, and promises of his word, the labours of his ministers, and the influences of his Spirit. All your bright and comfortable hopes proceed from the God of hope. It becomes you to trace back your life with great care, and to observe how full of divine goodness every stage of it hath been; and, after every such survey, to own the care of heaven, with great seriousness, both in your converse with men, and your addresses to God. Now let me show you what good effects such a recollection and acknowledgment will be likely to produce.

(1.) It will promote and cherish your gratitude to God. A review of your many comforts and deliverances will naturally lead you to think, whence they came. A few moments' reflection will show you that they all proceed from a good God; and this will draw your heart nearer to him. Such a survey of the divine favours tends to keep the memory of them fresh upon the mind, and to lead you to an habitual sense of God, as your friend and father in Christ, to whom you are indebted for all you have received and enjoy. Without such frequent and affectionate recollections of God's goodness, you will be apt to forget your obligations; at least to lose that quick sense of them which it becomes you to feel. Present difficulties, burdens, and infirmities might otherwise engage all your attention; and your mercies and the Author of them be too much forgotten. You can scarce take such a survey without observing how few have enjoyed such advantages and favours as you; how many are born of wicked parents; turned out into the wide world, without provision, which is bad, and without education, which is worse; how many, who set out with you in life, are long since dead;

some of them, it is to be feared, in an unconverted state, and have therefore long been in torments; how many that yet survive, have suffered, and are still suffering, those evils from which you have been delivered, and want those mercies which you enjoy. This will keep alive a thankful temper; and when you thus seriously recollect and acknowledge, that "hitherto the Lord your God hath helped you," you will gratefully inquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?"

(2.) It will tend to prevent your murmuring under the burdens and infirmities of age. Every one knows that this is too common amongst the aged; and therefore I shall not be thought disrespectful in cautioning you against it. You are now arrived at those days in which there is no pleasure. But a survey of the divine goodness will help to cure a fretful and complaining temper, by showing you that you have had days of pleasure, months and years of health and ease. You have known what the world calls better days, and have had a large share of providential bounties. By thus balancing accounts, you will soon see that you have no reason to murmur; especially when you consider, as true Christians never forget it, how unworthy you are of these bounties, and how much you have done every year and every day of your lives to forfeit them. Besides, if you are Christians indeed, you have unspeakable mercies to be thankful for; what God hath done for your souls; the beginning and progress of his work of grace in them; all the privileges, supports, and consolations, you have enjoyed; all your reviving and delightful hopes; nay, even your present infirmities and burdens are mercies, as kindly intended to wean your hearts from this world, and make the heavenly rest more welcome and joyful to you.

(3.) It will promote your continual activity in God's service. God hath always some work for his servants to do, while they are in this world. They are to do his will, or suffer it. It was an observation of the pious and excellent Dr. Watts, in the close of his life, that "the business of a Christian is to bear the will of God, as well as to do it. If I were in health," said he, "I could be doing that; and that I may do now. The best thing in obedience is a regard to the will of God; and the way to that is to get our inclinations and aversions as much mortified as we can." A serious recollection of his goodness will lead you continually to study what you can yet do for him; how you may yet glorify him on earth. This will dispose you to serve him with all your active powers, and prevent you from making your infirmities a plea for negligence, while you have yet some capacity of usefulness. It will dispose you to recommend religion to all about you by bearing testimony to its reality, importance, and comfort; and by being examples of patience,

meekness, and cheerfulness, under the burdens of nature. Thus will a sense of divine goodness diffuse a genial warmth over your souls, which will make you bring forth the fruits of righteousness, even in old age. Consider, once more,

(4.) It will encourage your prayers and your hope. Your past experience of God's care will be an excellent plea in your prayers for future supplies and defence, and will animate your faith and hope. You will naturally conclude, with the apostle, that he who hath delivered and doth deliver, can and will deliver; that he will still redeem, even unto death. Going back in your thoughts to promises that have been accomplished, will lead your souls to a cheerful repose, in full persuasion that what yet remain will be fulfilled in their season; yea, that he, who hath often granted you life from the dead, will "quicken your mortal bodies," and bring them up from the depths of the earth. This recollection will lead your thoughts to heaven, where your pious ancestors are; where they live to God; and will encourage your hopes of meeting them above, and being for ever with them. Thus St. Paul argued, "The Lord stood with me, and strengthened and delivered me; and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me to his heavenly kingdom."* Thus will your devout recollection and acknowledgment of divine care and goodness tend to cherish habitual gratitude; to prevent your murmuring under your infirmities; to promote your continued activity in God's service; and encourage your prayers and your hope.

Let me sum up this head in the words of an excellent writer. "Devotional exercises would settle the ferment of our youthful passions, and sweeten the last dregs of our advanced age. How would this make our lives yield the calmest satisfaction, as some flowers shed the most fragrant odours just at the close of the day! And perhaps there is no better way to prevent a deadness and flatness of spirit from succeeding, when the briskness of our passions goes off, than to acquire an early taste for those spiritual delights whose leaf withers not, and whose verdure remains in the winter of our days."†

I now proceed to the other branch of instruction, grounded on the text.

2. It is the duty of aged and dying Christians to bless and pray for their descendants. It is our common duty to pray and make intercession for one another. Those to whom we are allied by the ties of nature or friendship claim a particular share in our intercessions. Let aged Christians, after the example of Jacob, pray for their children and grandchildren. When they are absent, and removed to settlements at a distance, bear them on your hearts before God, and in every prayer make mention of them; especially pray for them when they are with you. Be

* 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18.

† Secl.

frequently offering up a short ejaculation for them; and do it sometimes in their presence and hearing. There would be a peculiar beauty and propriety, were you, like Jacob, when you are weak and dying, to lay your hands upon them, and seriously and solemnly "bless them in the name of the Lord." Let Jacob's prayer for his grandchildren direct yours. It will not be displeasing to God, nor unworthy your character as Christians, to pray that your name may be supported, and your family flourish, when you are gone; that God would feed and defend your posterity, as he hath done you. But let God and them see that you are chiefly solicitous to obtain spiritual blessings for them; more concerned to have religion maintained in your families than your name and fortunes. Let it be manifest that you desire nothing so much for your descendants as that they may be heirs of the covenant of grace, and have the Lord for their God: that they may walk worthy their pious ancestors and Christian privileges, and be a seed to serve Christ and uphold religion. Express in their presence your experience of the divine goodness, and your thankfulness for it. Exhort them to know and serve the God of their fathers; and accompany all with your earnest prayers. To excite you to imitate the example of the good patriarch, let me urge upon you these three considerations.

(1.) It is a becoming expression of your faith and trust in God, and regard for your children. It is a proper acknowledgment of God's providence, and your dependence upon it, to continue the blessing in your family. Accordingly, the apostle tells us, "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph;"* by faith in God's providence, revelations, and promises. You will thus do honour to the power, goodness, and faithfulness of God. It will express a proper regard to the glory of God, when you pray that religion may still be received and entertained in your family as a sacred and honoured guest; while it is excluded from so many families where it once resided, and to which it added true dignity. It is also a becoming expression of regard to your children. You can do little for them now, and must quickly leave them in a tempting, ensnaring, and dangerous world. How can you better show your love to them and concern for their happiness, than by commending them to God, and leaving them in his powerful and gracious hands?

(2.) It will be likely to make a good impression upon their hearts, and so qualify them for the divine blessing. It appears from the history of the patriarchs, that in their days men considered a parent's blessing as of the greatest importance to their happiness; and feared his curse, as bringing and entailing misfortune and distress on the family. And no wonder; for God

* Heb. xi. 21.

seems to have confirmed the paternal blessing, and inflicted the calamity included in the prophetic curse. I see no superstition in supposing, that the wishes and prayers of serious parents may still carry great weight with them. And, indeed, this thought is so natural to mankind, was so common among the heathen, and is so much countenanced in scripture, that all but abandoned sinners will pay great regard to the sentiments and prayers of dying saints.* It may be expected that their descendants will receive their instructions with peculiar reverence, and join in their prayers with peculiar fervency. "The lips of the righteous," especially of Christ's old disciples, "feed many." Your dying prayers and blessing may dispose them to retain a sense of the importance of religion and the divine favour, and to desire and seek the blessing for themselves. They will be likely to remember your instructions and prayers when you are dead. This may be the means of keeping them stedfast to God, or reclaiming them when they go astray, and either way promote their felicity.

(3.) It is the way to procure the divine blessing for them. God hath never "said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." When he commanded the priests under the law to bless the people, he said, "They shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them."† God hath often favoured the children of good men with some peculiar privileges and influences from above, for the sake of their pious ancestors. And it is evidently a part of the divine plan, that some should fare the better for the piety and prayers of others. This consideration, together with God's many promises of hearing prayer, encourage you to hope that your prayers and blessing will avail for the good of your descendants. And surely you cannot, in gratitude to God, or love to them, deny them so cheap a service, and not leave a blessing behind you. Thus will your solemnly praying for and blessing your descendants naturally express your believing regard to God, and affectionate concern for them; it will be likely to make a good and lasting impression upon their hearts, and to engage the divine blessing upon them. I hope my aged friends will habitually and strongly feel the force of these motives to imitate Jacob's example, and abound in the exercises of devotion and benevolence. These will afford them unspeakable pleasure in a dying hour; and they will be ready

* Homer, *Iliad*, x. 445, &c.; Plato de Leg. xi. p. 931, who saith, that "every wise person revered and esteemed the prayers of his parents, knowing that they were in many cases fulfilled." See Gen. xxvii., Exod. xx. 12, "Honour thy father and mother, that thy days may be long;" it may be translated, "that they may prolong thy days;" that is, by their prayers and blessing, cause thy days to be lengthened. Compare Ecclus. iii. 8, 9, "Honour thy father and mother, both in word and deed, that a blessing may come upon thee from them. For the blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children, but the curse of the mother rooteth out foundations."

† Numb. vi. 27.

to adopt the words of the learned Dr. Donne, who said to his friends upon his death bed, "I repent of all my life, but that part of it which I spent in communion with God, and in doing good." I conclude the discourse with these two

REFLECTIONS.

1. *Let children desire and value the prayers and blessing of their aged, dying parents.* When Joseph heard that his father Jacob was sick, he went to visit him, and took his two children, that he might bless them. Let the children and grandchildren of aged dying saints frequently visit them, reverence their instructions, hearken to their history of God's dealings with them, and desire and value their prayers. Their age, gravity, piety, and experience make what they say to you, or to God for you, peculiarly solemn, weighty, and impressing. And whether you regard it or not, remember, God regards it. If you mind what they say, it will be a witness for you; if you despise it, it will be a witness against you in the great day. If you know any thing of God and religion, and the power of prayer, you will not despise or slight this their last labour of love.

2. *Let the children of good men labour to secure the blessing for themselves.* Your descent from pious ancestors is a greater honour to you than a descent from or alliance with the noblest families upon earth that live without God. It should recommend religion to you; that God was the God of your fathers. It should be a prevailing motive with you to keep up the worship of God in your houses, that yours hath been a praying family for several generations. But remember, their prayers and blessings will not on the whole avail you, if you degenerate from their piety and stedfastness. If you do not tread in their steps, and (in the language of the text) walk before God as they did, the greater will be your guilt and your misery. You will forfeit the benefits of God's covenant; you will miss of the blessing, and be rejected by him. And then what will it signify to wear their names, and inherit their fortunes? Yea, if you live to be a hundred years old, and enjoy the greatest worldly prosperity, you will be accursed of God,* and driven to an eternal distance from your pious ancestors, and from the presence of God and the Lamb. For thus saith the Son of God, and oh that the children of good men would think of his awful words! "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets and saints in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."†

* Isaiah lxx. 20.

† Luke xiii. 28.

DISCOURSE X.

JOSEPH'S DYING ASSURANCE TO HIS BRETHREN, THAT GOD
WOULD VISIT THEM, CONSIDERED.

GENESIS L. 24.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die ; and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

THESE, my friends, are some of the last words of Joseph, that wise, great, and good man ; and therefore they claim your attention. But they deserve particular notice, because the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that “by faith Joseph when he died” (or was dying, as the word signifies) “made mention of the departure of children of Israel out of Egypt, and gave commandment concerning his bones,”* that they should be carried with them into Canaan, as in the verse following the text ; firmly believing the revelation and promise made to his fathers, concerning their posterity’s return to it. Jacob his father, when he was dying, had reminded his own children of the same, and ordered them to bury him in Canaan. So solicitous were they to keep up in their descendants the belief and expectation of their inheriting that land ! Joseph is said in the text to have spoken to his brethren concerning this. As he was one of the youngest of Jacob’s sons, and lived to be a hundred and ten years old, it is probable that many, if not most, of his own brethren, the sons of Jacob, were then dead ; so that, by “brethren,” we are to understand (as often in scripture) his relations in general,† and particularly his own descendants, as notice is taken in the preceding verse of some of his great grandchildren being brought to him. “To them he said, I die ; and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” The illustration of these words may afford useful instruction to us all ; especially to my aged friends, whom I am, at this time, particularly to address. And we may observe in them,

I. The reflection which Joseph makes upon his present circumstances ;

II. The assurance he gives his brethren, that God would visit them ; and,

III. The further assurance he gives them, that God would at length bring them into the Holy Land. Let us consider,

I. *The reflection which Joseph makes upon his present circumstances.*

* Heb. xi. 22.

"I die," or am dying. He was very aged and infirm. He knew that neither his authority, power, and honour in Egypt, nor his wisdom and piety, could secure him from the stroke of death. He found himself declining, and was now probably confined to a sick bed : he was therefore willing to improve his few remaining moments, for the instruction and comfort of his relatives. He had been a great friend and benefactor to them, as appears from his whole history. He had saved them alive in famine, provided them a comfortable settlement in Egypt, and now he was dying he could do little more for them, than give them his best advice and encouragement. And this he doth with the tenderness of a parent, and with the authority and piety of a patriarch. Observe,

II. *The assurance he gives them, that God would visit them.*

"God will surely visit you." This doth not so much refer to his bringing them into Canaan (that is mentioned afterwards) as to the affording them his presence, protection, and favour, during their stay in Egypt. For thus Jacob expresseth the same encouragement ; "Behold I die, but God shall be with you."* Probably Joseph saw his relations very much grieved and discouraged at the thoughts of losing him : losing their protector and benefactor in a strange country, where they had many enemies, as being of a different nation, and different religion. The Egyptians were strongly prejudiced against them, on account of their occupation as shepherds ; and because they would not comply with the idolatries of that land. Joseph well knew, that they would be rigorously and cruelly used in Egypt ; for so God had foretold to Abraham, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them : and they shall afflict them four hundred years."† Therefore Joseph assures them, that God would visit them ; that he would view their afflictions with an eye of pity, provide for their wants, direct them in all their perplexities, and protect them in the season of danger ; that he would raise up another deliverer for them when he was dead. And this they might argue, from his promise to Abraham, of "making them a great nation ;" and from what he had already done by a train of mysterious providences, in sending Joseph before them, giving him favour in the sight of Pharaoh, rescuing him from impending dangers, and making him the instrument of their support and security. From hence they might conclude that some circumstances, which were in appearance against them, would turn out for their good. We are to consider,

III. *The further assurance he gives them, that God would bring them into the land of Canaan.*

* Gen. xlviii. 21.

† Gen. xv. 13.

And this he argues, and teaches them to argue, from the promise made to their ancestors successively; to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and confirmed by the oath of that great Being who cannot lie; that he would judge the Egyptians, bring Israel out with great substance, settle them in Canaan, and give it them for an inheritance for ever. This intimated to them that they must not think of settling in Egypt, though the country might be ever so agreeable, and its princes ever so kind. It likewise intimated to them, that they must not fear any attempts of their enemies to keep them there by force. Joseph foresaw the difficulties that would arise, and therefore he assures them that God would fulfil all his promises, and bring them safe to Canaan. Accordingly you know by what a series of glorious miracles God made the Egyptians willing to release them; conducted them through the Red sea and the wilderness, and brought them to the good land which he had promised to their fathers. I am now to point out to you the useful instruction which these words suggest.

APPLICATION.

1. To aged Christians; and,
2. To those in younger life, who are the offspring of good men.

1. *To aged Christians.* By them these words may naturally be used, as they are the language of an aged, dying saint; as the good land, to which he refers, was a type or figure of that "better country, even the heavenly one," which, the apostle tells us, the patriarchs sought;* and as they have been often adopted by dying Christians, and addressed to their survivors. Now they suggest to you, my honoured friends, these three important branches of duty; to think and speak much of dying; to reflect that God will visit and take care of your posterity; and to remind them of it for their encouragement, when you are dying and leaving the world. Bear with me, then, while I exhort you,

(1.) Frequently to think and speak of dying. You well know that "it is appointed to men once to die;" that in the course of nature, your removal cannot be far off. Your frequent infirmities and sensible decays remind you, that you must quickly put off the body; and therefore it will be monstrous and inexcusable folly in you to forget it. Think of your death, as a certain and a near event. But think of it seriously, as a most important and solemn event. Speak of it as a concern not to be trifled with, but what you are nearly and deeply interested in; as it is the period of your time of trial, and the commencement of an eternal unchangeable state. This hath been the practice of good men. Thus Isaac said, "I am old, I know not the day of my death." "Behold I die," said Jacob, "and am to be

* Heb. xi. 16.

gathered to my people." "I am this day going the way of all the earth," said Joshua; and David said the same. "I am ready to be offered up," said Paul, "and the time of my departure is at hand." "I must shortly put off the body," said Peter. Endeavour, like these holy men, to make the thoughts of death familiar to your minds, and let those with whom you converse perceive that you are daily expecting it. This thought will lead you to sit loose to the world; to contract your business into as little a compass as may be; and to avoid all those cares and anxieties which distract the mind, and would call off your attention from better, from heavenly things. This would engage you to make your wills, and "set your houses in order," that you may have nothing to embarrass your thoughts or take up your time in a dying hour. This would especially engage you to be always ready; to set your souls in order; to renew the exercise of repentance and faith, and endeavour to have your hearts more strongly influenced by the love of Christ. It would lead you to exercise those graces which are peculiarly suited to your age and circumstances; especially faith, patience, meekness, gratitude, and heavenly-mindedness; and be daily aspiring after brighter evidences and firmer hopes. It would direct your views to the good land, which God hath promised. You would "have respect to the recompence of reward," and improve in your acquaintance with the work and blessedness of heaven, by conversing with the word of God, and meditating upon the glory to be revealed. Think of your pious friends and relations, that are gone before; as Joseph in the text speaks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Think how they are employed, and what their happiness is; that you may long to be with them, and be daily improving in your preparation for your change. By such reflections and such a conduct you will be preserved from the love of the world, be reconciled to the thoughts of death, and be willing to depart. In the mean time, let the expectation of death quicken you to do what you can for God and your generation. Do it quickly; for you have not even the shadow of an excuse for delaying. If death finds you thus employed, be not afraid of it, for "God will surely visit you" with his light, and strength, and peace, and bring you to the heavenly country; and at length "deliver you from the bondage of corruption" in the grave, "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

(2.) Reflect that God will visit and take care of your posterity when you are gone. It will be a great satisfaction to you to reflect upon this. "God will surely visit them." Anxious thoughts will sometimes arise in your minds about those whom you will leave behind. "What will become of my poor children and grandchildren, when I am gone? They will be orphans, or want a guide and a friend." It may often give you pain to think of leaving them in a world so full of temptation, sin, and trouble,

perhaps to struggle with poverty, and meet with hard treatment from the oppression, deceit, or unkindness of others. But when these anxious thoughts arise, endeavour to banish them from your minds, and cherish this belief, that "God will surely visit them." Labour to divest yourself of such affection to them and concern for them as is painful to yourself, and no way serviceable either to you or them; especially such as is inconsistent with faith in God and his promises. Consider, that were you to live, you could do but little for them; and indeed nothing, without the assistance and blessing of God. You could advise them, but the Lord must direct their steps, and make their way prosperous. Leave them therefore cheerfully to him and his good providence, "in whom the fatherless findeth mercy;" and whose visits will abundantly make up the loss of you, were your abilities much greater than they are. When your generous souls look beyond the narrow concerns of your own family and relations; when you are solicitous about the interest of religion, and "tremble for the ark of God;" remember, that anxiety about these is to be restrained; for God will surely visit his church: he will take care that it shall not be lost. Though you die, Christ lives. He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and therefore "the children of his servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before him."* That God will thus visit those that survive you, you may fairly infer from several considerations; particularly, the goodness of his nature. They are his creatures, and therefore he will not forsake the work of his own hands. "He is good to all," giveth food to all flesh, "taketh care of man and beast," and his visitation preserves their spirits. If they are his children, you have still less reason for anxiety; for surely their heavenly Father will give them all good things that they need. You may argue this from his promise and covenant. You see "seed time and harvest, summer and winter, day and night," do not cease. The same providence which first established their regular succession is working to maintain it. Your offspring have the same angels to guard them as guarded you; the same word to direct and comfort them; the same unchangeable Saviour to redeem them; the same Spirit to enlighten and sanctify them; the same covenant of grace to be all their salvation and all their desire. Now "the word of the Lord shall stand for ever; his goodness is from generation to generation, and his truth endureth throughout all generations." You may argue it further, from your own experience. "Remember all the way the Lord your God hath led you through the wilderness. He hath fed you all your life long to this day, and redeemed you from evil," and your fathers before you. And doth his power and care cease, when yours doth? Think of the several stages of your lives; the places where you have lived; the

* Psalm cii. 28.

scenes through which you have passed ; and especially the extraordinary appearance of Providence for you ; that, as you have heard from your fathers, so you have seen and experienced. Recollect what you have observed of God's dealings with good men and their children ; and you will see reason to say, as David, " I have been young, and now am old ; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."* Then ask your own hearts these questions, " Is the Lord's hand waxed short ?" Is his ear heavy ? Are the stores of his bounty exhausted ? " Is his mercy clean gone ? Doth his promise fail ?" Why then should you suspect, that he will not visit your posterity, as he hath done you and your fathers ? Let it be your care, my friends, to give glory to God, by acknowledging and trusting his goodness, and to " encourage yourselves in the Lord your God." I add,

(3.) Remind your posterity of this, for their encouragement, when you are dying and leaving the world, that " God will surely visit them." Your fathers encouraged you with this thought, as Jacob did Joseph. Encourage your children with it, as Joseph did his brethren. If they have any affection for you, or any concern for their own safety and happiness, the prospect of losing you will be grievous to them. When you see them discouraged then is the time to let them know, that though you die, God will visit them. Thus the apostle commands the aged men and women to be " teachers of good things." And really, aged Christians are capable of doing much more good than they do, if that breath which is spent in complaining were spent in thanksgiving ; and that time which is consumed in commending the past age, and finding fault with the present, were employed in " showing God's strength to this generation, and his power to those that are to come."† Let me entreat you to consult the honour of God, the welfare of your posterity, and your own credit and comfort so much, as to take pains to exhort and encourage those about you. Exhort them to make religion their business, and God their portion and refuge. Assure them that their own wisdom and power will do nothing without God ; that nothing will make them happy but his gracious visits. Speak to them often of the suitableness and excellency of Christ, as a Saviour : and assure them, that if they love him, and live by faith in him, he and his Father will come unto them, and take up their abode with them.‡ Thus pious Anna, who was of a great age, spoke of Christ to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.§ Encourage them to taste and see that the Lord is good. Pray for them earnestly, that God would be with them and visit them. Comfort them with this thought, that " when father and mother forsake them, the Lord will take them up ;" and that his visits

* Psalm xxxvii. 25.

† Psalm lxxi. 18.

‡ John xiv. 23.

§ Luke ii. 38.

will be infinitely better than any fortune and honour they can inherit from you, or procure for themselves. When you tell them that God will visit them, do not speak doubtfully of it ; but say with Joseph, " He will surely visit you ;" and repeat it again, as he doth in the next verse. To encourage your faith and theirs, remind them how punctually the promise made to the patriarchs of inheriting the land of Canaan was fulfilled. It was indeed about four hundred years before it was fulfilled ; so long was their faith and patience exercised ; yet at last God appeared to visit and deliver his servants, and vindicate his own faithfulness. Hence you may be assured that those promises which God hath made to believers of heavenly rest, will be as punctually accomplished in their season. To strengthen their faith, tell them likewise your own experience ; how good God hath been to you all your days ; how much mercy you have found in every part of life ; that it may be a motive to them to serve him, and to hope and trust in him in the darkest seasons, and in the greatest adversity. Remind them often of the good land he hath promised ; the country you are going to. Speak of it with faith, with cheerfulness and thankfulness, as the end of your labours and suffering, and the accomplishment of your wishes and expectations. Express your desire and hope of meeting them there at length, and being for ever with them. Solemnly charge them with your dying breath, that they never forsake God and his ways ; especially, that they " fall not out by the way," but " live in love," that so " the God of peace and love may be with them." If this be their character, you may assure them, upon the authority of God himself, that he will visit them with his mercy upon earth, and with everlasting salvation in heaven. The dying words of Christian friends, and especially parents, make a lasting impression upon the minds of survivors. But it is time for me to proceed and address myself,

2. *To those descendants of good men, who are in the prime, or middle of their days.* And my exhortation to you shall be, that you encourage yourselves with this thought, that God will visit you ; that you pray for his visits ; and be prepared to receive them.

(1.) Encourage yourselves with this thought, that God will surely visit you when your parents and friends die. If you are thoughtful and serious, you cannot but have great concern about your journey through life ; sensible of the many difficulties, temptations, and dangers that attend you. These are greater, at least on one account, than those of your fathers ; on account of the present state of religion ; considering how light even the professors of it make of sins of omission ; how different they are from their fathers, in neglecting to keep the sabbath and attend religious ordinances, in conformity to the world, and complying with its dangerous fashions : practices which our fathers would have trembled at the thought of. This circumstance

increases your danger. But let it not dishearten you. God will visit you. Consider him as "the God of your fathers." Think how he visited them, and remember what you "have heard with your ears, and your fathers have told you, concerning the great things he did for them, especially in their days of trouble."* If new difficulties and dangers arise, his wisdom and power can never be at a loss to assist and extricate you. He can help you in a thousand circumstances, in which they, if they were living, could not. He is the God of your fathers, and you are his covenant people; and his covenant will he not break, nor forsake the seed of his servants. Many of us have found it so. God hath not left us destitute of his mercy and truth, when the guides of our youth have been taken from us. We have found in him a wise, kind, faithful, powerful guardian; and having obtained help of him, we continue to this day. And this is his promise to every good man, whatever earthly friends die and desert him, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "Wait on the Lord, therefore, and be of good courage. Trust in him at all times, ye people: pour out your hearts before him;" which leads me to add,

(2.) Pray earnestly for his visits. Do not you need them as much as your fathers, or more? Can you do without them? And are they to be obtained any other way than by faith and prayer? Go therefore to God, and cry unto him, "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth." Your parents assured you, upon the best authority, that God would visit you. But you cannot forget what they told you, agreeable to what he himself hath said, that "for this he will be sought unto by you." Consider, likewise, what visits of God they thought most valuable and comfortable; namely, that he would visit them with his grace and Spirit, shed abroad his love in their hearts, and that he would leave a blessing behind him; a blessing infinitely better than any earthly enjoyments. Let this therefore be your language, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest to thy people; oh, visit me with thy salvation."* And let this be the daily petition and request of all of us, as it was of Solomon, "The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers; let him not leave us, nor forsake us, that he may incline our hearts to walk in his ways and keep his commandments, which he commanded our fathers."† But this reminds me of adding,

(3.) Be prepared to receive his visits. Do nothing to forfeit them, or drive away this heavenly friend. God is too pure and holy a Being ever to visit a sinful heart. If you are not converted, justified, and sanctified by the blood of Christ, and by the Spirit of God, you have no reason to expect his gracious visits. If you use an earthly friend ill, he will visit you no more. If you forsake God, and fall into habitual sin, he will

* Psalm xlv. 1.

† 1 Kings viii. 57.

cast you off for ever, and his only visits will be in a way of judgment. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." There must be the greatest care that you do not decline in religion, and lose the life and fervour of it. For "iniquity will separate between you and God, and hide good things from you."* If you grow cold and formal in religion; if you neglect to visit God's house on the sabbath, and his throne every day, or do it with no more seriousness and ardour than if you were visiting and conversing with a common acquaintance, your communion with him will be interrupted: he will withdraw from you, and take away his good Spirit. And then, though he should visit you with ever so much health, riches, and honour, your happiness is at an end. If you desire that the God of your fathers should visit you, be followers of them. Carefully distinguish between their real excellencies and their weaknesses; and do not, as many unwise children do, throw them away together. I can hardly inculcate this too often or too strongly, that unless you imitate the piety of your ancestors, you cannot expect that God should visit you. You are not to depend on their prayers for you, unless you daily and fervently pray for yourselves. Remember David's address to Solomon; "Know thou and serve the God of thy fathers; for if thou seek him, he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." The piety of your ancestors, all their prayers for you, and all the admonitions and encouragements they have given you, will be a great aggravation of your guilt and punishment, if you fail to walk in their steps. Let it be your daily care, that your hearts may be prepared for the visits of the Lord; and that you may be getting ready for the good land, the better country, which he hath promised. And finally, when you are leaving earth, hand down this sacred consolation and blessing to your children, and solemnly commend them to God and the word of his grace. To conclude, may God visit us all with his favour and love, through the rest of the journey of life; and especially make the last stage of it comfortable, honourable, and useful! May he bring us at length to that rest that remaineth for his people, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and all his saints, in his kingdom and presence for ever! Amen.

* Isaiah lix. 2.

DISCOURSE XI.

THE HONOUR OF AGED PIETY.

PROVERBS XVI. 31.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

It is a dictate of natural conscience, that reverence is due to the aged, merely on account of their age. It was frequently and strongly inculcated, by the heathen lawgivers and philosophers, that every one should honour the aged both in word and deed; and one of their poets tells us, that “they held it to be a great crime, and worthy of death, if a young person did not rise up to show respect to the aged.” The general practice of the heathen, both ancient and modern, confirms and illustrates this dictate of nature. The scriptures command us to reverence the aged, and to show them all external marks of respect and honour. But when wisdom and piety accompany old age, it is peculiarly venerable. An ancient Jewish writer in the Apocrypha saith, “Oh, how comely a thing is judgment for grey hairs, and for ancient men to know counsel! Oh, how comely is the wisdom of old men, and understanding and counsel to men of honour! Much experience is the crown of old men, and the fear of God is their glory.”* Solomon comprehends these thoughts in a few expressive words in the text; “The hoary head is a crown of glory,” or a glorious crown; it is a beautiful ornament, and renders persons worthy of veneration and respect “if it be found in the way of righteousness;” if they have walked in the ways of religion, and their long lives have been employed in the service of God. An important and useful observation, and capable of affording instruction to us all, especially to the aged! In treating of it, I shall,

I. Show on what accounts aged piety is peculiarly honourable; and,

II. What useful instructions we may learn from the subject.

I. *I am to show on what accounts the piety of the aged is peculiarly honourable.*

And here I shall mention these particulars. It began early; it is founded on knowledge and experience; it is approved and stedfast; it is attended with great usefulness; and it renders them peculiarly ripe for glory.

1. It began early, and hath long continued. This must be supposed; and is indeed implied in the text, when it is said, “If it be found in the way of righteousness;” intimating, that such a one

* Eccclus. xxv. 4—6.

hath been long walking in that way. Persons who have spent their youth in serving divers lusts and pleasures, and their middle age in the pursuit of worldly enjoyments, to the total or habitual neglect of religion, are not entitled to this honour. Late converts, though their eternal interests should be secure, will not only have less comfort in their own souls, but appear less amiable in the eyes of others, than early ones. They will remember, to their shame, the sins of their youth and riper age; and others may remember them to their dishonour. But where persons have, with good Obadiah, "feared the Lord from their youth,"* and walked in his fear all their days, they claim peculiar respect. They have indeed lived; lived to a good purpose; lived to God and Christ: and as this will be their own rejoicing, so it will entitle them to, and even command, honour from others.

2. Their piety is founded on knowledge and experience. We come into the world with few ideas, and ignorant of every thing about us. Knowledge is gained by observation, reflection, reading, and converse. Our stock of knowledge naturally increaseth with advancing years; and though it will be more or less, according to men's natural abilities, education, and the pains they take to improve their understandings; yet all will be continually acquiring new ideas; those that were in the mind will be reduced to better order, and applied to more useful purposes. Hence, though the aged are not always wise,† yet they frequently are so, and always much wiser than younger persons of equal capacities, advantages, and application. This renders them worthy of honour. But aged saints are peculiarly honourable, because their knowledge is of the best kind, and applied to the best purposes. It is of the best kind. They have just notions of those things which are of the greatest moment, and most worthy the attention and reflection of reasonable creatures. The converting grace of God generally begins in enlightening the understanding, and leading it to discern those things that differ, and approve those that are excellent. They who have entered themselves into Christ's school betimes, have great advantages for learning his religion; of becoming well instructed in the nature and design, the doctrines and duties of the gospel, and being wise to salvation. Aged saints are well acquainted with the best things. Others may know more of the world, of trade, of philosophy, or human policy; but they know Christ and him crucified. They have made many useful observations on the methods of Providence towards themselves, their families, and the church of God. They know much of the evil and mischief of sin; of the nature of temptations, and the many devices of Satan. They are well acquainted with the suitableness and all-sufficiency of the Redeemer, and the pleasures of religion; and have a rich treasure

* 1 Kings xviii. 12.

† Job xxxii. 9.

of Christian experience in their hearts. This knowledge renders them truly honourable; especially as it is applied to the best purposes. Their religion is not the effect of a hasty resolution, but a deliberate choice, founded on serious inquiry and long experience. Their advancing years, their study of the works and word of God, and attendance on the means of grace, have enlarged their faculties and ripened their understandings; so that they are fully convinced that the ways of the Lord are right, and they have circumspectly walked in them. They have had time to examine every thing that can be alleged in favour of sin and holiness. They have tried many of those things in which the young and the unexperienced are ready to place their happiness, and found them all empty, void, and deceitful; and this hath led them to give their young friends many wise and friendly cautions. They know, from frequent inquiries and long trial, that nothing but religion can satisfy the soul; and that fearing God and keeping his commandments is the whole duty and happiness of man. Now this wisdom is, as Solomon saith, an ornament of grace unto them.*

3. The piety of aged Christians is approved and steadfast. It is hard to judge of the real characters of men, and to know who are sincere and who hypocritical in their profession of religion. Many may put on the appearance of piety to serve some secular purpose. Yea, worthy motives may prevail for awhile; so that we may entertain a good opinion of the integrity of those who afterwards fall away. It may at length appear that they "have no root in themselves," and their latter end will be worse than their beginning. But the piety of an aged Christian is approved. He hath passed through various scenes, and had calls and opportunities to exercise the various graces of the Christian character. He hath been attacked by the allurements and by the terrors of the world; yet, like a good soldier of Jesus Christ, hath bravely stood his ground. He hath passed through the trials of adversity, and the more dangerous trials of prosperity. He hath survived most of his friends; and by their removal hath had his patience and submission proved. He probably hath endured some persecution for conscience' sake, and yet maintaining his integrity, and by not fainting in the day of adversity, he hath an inward testimony, that his heart is right with God; and he is manifested to the consciences of others, that he is an upright, resolute Christian. An aged saint is like a tree arrived to maturity; that, having brought forth fruit many years in its season, stood many storms and taken root the faster, is known by all around to be very valuable. His life long spent in the service of God makes his virtue eminent and conspicuous, and bears witness, not only to the sincerity of his faith and profession, but to their firmness and steadiness. His perseverance

* Prov. iv. 9.

in religion demonstrates the uprightness of his heart, the strength of his love to God and Christ, and the immoveableness of his resolution for the future. He is "rooted in the faith, grounded, and settled;" his habits of piety are confirmed and become quite natural; and the frequent trials of his faith are found to praise before God, and honour before men.

4. The piety of the aged is attended with great usefulness. God is glorified when Christians bring forth much fruit; and in proportion to men's usefulness will be their honour. The piety of an aged Christian is much to the glory of God, as it shows the excellency of his dispensations, and especially the gospel, as means of producing and increasing this piety, and bearing the Christian on through difficulties, temptations, and opposition. Aged saints have been, and continue to be, very useful to mankind. They have, for many years, shone as lights in a dark world, and produced a secret veneration for religion in the hearts of those who will not be persuaded to pursue it. Their stedfast piety "puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men," who complain of the restraints of religion as unreasonable and intolerable, and of the Redeemer's laws as impracticable. It shows that the difficulties of it are not so formidable as young minds are ready to imagine, and that the most powerful temptations to sin may, by divine grace, be overcome. They are useful to mankind as living witnesses to the kindness of God's providence, the riches of his grace, and his faithfulness to his promises. The diligence and zeal of their vigorous days render them blessings to the world and church; and though they are ready to think that they are incapable of serving God and their generation in the decline of life, and speak of themselves as quite useless, yet herein they greatly err. The light of their good example shines before men. They are set forth as patterns of patience, contentment, and thankfulness under the burdens and infirmities of age. Their prayers are serviceable to the world and to the church. While their faculties continue, they are capable of giving excellent counsel and advice to those about them; which, coming from persons of their age and wisdom, will have peculiar weight, and tend to strengthen their faith and resolution. Their accounts of their own experience in past life; their testimony to the truth and the comfort of religion, and showing God's strength and grace to the generation that is growing up, are very useful. And perhaps nothing hath made deeper impressions of religion upon the minds of the rising generation than the counsels and weighty sayings of their aged and dying parents. Or if they are not capable of saying much, their patient submission to their afflictions, and their cheerful expectations of death and glory, speak plainly and forcibly; show the excellency of Christian principles and motives, and strongly recommend to all about them a sted-

fast adherence to them. Thus are they useful, even to the last, and therefore honourable.

5. Their piety renders them peculiarly ripe for glory, as their hoary heads show that they are near to it. They are to be considered as being on the very borders of the heavenly world; just taking leave of us, and speedily to be joined to the spirits of just men made perfect. The day is at hand when their warfare shall be accomplished, and their everlasting rest and triumph commence. Their race, which they run with patience and perseverance, is just concluded, and they will soon receive the prize. And when we consider an aged Christian as on the verge of heaven, and soon to receive the applause of Christ, we cannot but honour him whatever his appearance may be. His graces shine brighter through the wrinkles that deform his countenance; and those pains and languishings, which are the harbingers of death, are also the harbingers of glory. If we have any believing regard for the heavenly world and its blissful inhabitants, an aged saint that is so like them, and so speedily to be numbered among them, will be esteemed by us as worthy of great honour; and his hoary head will appear as a crown of glory, when we consider him as just going to receive a more glorious crown, which will never fade away, nor be attended with any care, sorrow, or suffering. From these particulars it appeareth, that the piety of the aged is peculiarly honourable; it commenced when they were young; it hath been founded on knowledge and experience; hath been well known, approved, and stedfast; in consequence of it they have been very useful in life, and are peculiarly ripe for heavenly glory, and soon to enter upon it. Let us now consider,

II. *What useful instructions we may learn from this subject.*

1. The hoary head is a disgrace and reproach to an old sinner. What more despicable character can there be, than that of a man who hath grown old in sin, and spent all his days in the service of the devil? How shocking it is to see persons in the advance and decline of life, who have enjoyed many religious advantages, yet appear ignorant of God and religion; and "when for the time they should have been teachers to others, have need to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God!"* How odious is it to observe them still hankering after the world, heaping up riches, and acting a fraudulent or a mean part to gain more! To be an old drunkard, an old swearer, an old miser, what a horrible character! "That is a miserable old age," saith a heathen philosopher, "which hath nothing venerable but grey hairs and wrinkles." A Jewish writer in the Apocrypha† observeth, that "honour-

* Heb. v. 12.

† Wisdom iv. 8, 9.

able age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years, but wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age.”* If any of you who are advanced in life have lived forgetful of God and your souls, unmindful of the great end of life and the business you were sent into the world about, be now awakened, and go not on to “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.” It is “high time indeed for you to awake out of sleep;” you have not a moment to lose. The goodness of God in sparing you hitherto, and not cutting you off in your sins, is a loud call to search and try your ways, to fly immediately for refuge to the hope of the gospel, and to employ the short remainder of your lives in the best manner; else your hoary heads will only aggravate your ignorance, carelessness, and presumption; and make your ruin more dreadful. For thus saith the Lord, “The sinner being an hundred years old, shall be accursed.”†

2. Aged saints ought to be revered. Some reverence is, indeed, due to all that are aged. It was a capital crime among some of the heathen to treat the aged with contempt. And one of their most ancient poets saith, “Reverence grey hairs, and give the aged your seat and all honours, and behave to them in every respect as you would to your father;” and another of them observes, that “old men are the particular favourites of heaven.” The law of God required the Jews to “rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of old men.”‡ And it is mentioned as one of the calamities of Jerusalem, that “the child should behave himself proudly against the ancient.”§ The persons of the aged should be honoured though their characters may be detestable; and the offices of kindness and pity should be tenderly performed to them. But great piety, joined with old age, renders it peculiarly honourable. Let us hold aged saints in the highest veneration; speak of them and to them with the greatest respect; tenderly pity and patiently bear with their weaknesses; and consider the excellency of their characters as casting a lustre even over their infirmities. Let us earnestly pray for them; that God would assist, support, and strengthen them. Let us also consult them and hearken to their advice. This is particularly the duty of the young, especially of the children of such eminent Christians. Let them pay the highest regard to their instructions and maxims. They are, alas! too apt to slight them; or if, as they sometimes express it, “they give the old folks a

* Virtue, not rolling suns, the mind matures.

That life is long, which answers life's great end.

The time that bears no fruit, deserves no name;

The man of wisdom is the man of years.

In hoary youth Methuselahs may die;

Oh how misdated on their flattering tombs! YOUNG.

† Isaiah lxx. 20.

‡ Lev. xix. 32.

§ Isaiah iii. 5.

hearing," they do not lay their admonitions to heart, and the consequence is generally fatal. Thus Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, lost his honour and the greatest part of his kingdom, "by forsaking the counsel of old men who had stood before his father, and following that of the young men who had grown up with himself."* Accordingly St. Peter exhorts, "Let the younger be subject to the elder," and show that subjection, esteem, and respect, which the united charms of a hoary head and a righteous character demand.

3. Aged saints should proceed in the ways of righteousness with thankfulness and courage. I would, with all deference, address "unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning;" and would exhort you, in the first place, to adore the grace of God, who hath restored your souls from your wanderings, and led you in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake: who hath supported both your lives and your graces hitherto, set this glorious crown on your head, and begotten you to a lively hope of greater glory, even immortal honour. And let me exhort the aged men and women, as Paul commands Titus to do, "that they be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience; that they be in behaviour as becometh godliness, and teachers of good things." Let me entreat you to proceed in the ways of righteousness, and not be weary of well doing. Remember the dignity of your hoary head, and be careful never to lose or lessen it. There is a remarkable story in the history of the Maccabees, which deserves the attention of aged Christians, "In the persecution under Antiochus, king of Syria, Eleazar, one of the principal scribes among the Jews, an aged man, was commanded, on pain of death, to eat swine's flesh, which was forbidden by the law of Moses; but he refused it. Some of his old acquaintance, in order to save his life, persuaded him to take his own provision and pretend to eat of the king's sacrifice. But," saith the historian, "he began to consider discreetly and as became his age, and the excellency of his ancient years, and the honour of his grey head, whereunto he was come; and his most honest education from a child; or rather the holy law made and given by God: therefore he said, 'It becometh not our age in any wise to dissemble, whereby many young persons might think, that Eleazar, being fourscore years old and ten, were now gone to a strange religion; and so they, through mine hypocrisy and desire to live a little time and a moment longer, should be deceived by me; and I get a stain to mine old age, and make it abominable. Wherefore, now manfully changing this life, I will show myself such a one as mine age requireth, and leave a notable example to such as be young.' And when he had said these words, immediately he went to the torment."† Polycarp, a primitive bishop and a disciple of St. John, being summoned before a

* 1 Kings xii.

† 2 Macc. vi. 18, &c.

heathen magistrate, and commanded to abjure Jesus Christ made this notable reply ; “ Fourscore and five years I have been serving Christ, and he hath never done me the least wrong : how then shall I blaspheme my King and Saviour ? ” Let your experience of the power and comforts of religion ; let such examples of steady piety ; let the near approach of death, and your hopes of glory, all join to make you very careful not to lose the things that ye have wrought, and sully the honour to which you have a claim. Labour after greater patience and contentment, greater mortification to the world, which you are so soon to leave, and to have your conversation habitually in heaven. Endeavour to be doing all the good you can, especially by bearing testimony to the pleasure and peace that are to be found in the way of righteousness. Aged Christians (as I hinted above) are apt to be discouraged, because they think they can do little for God. But, my friends, do the best you can, out of regard to the Master you serve, who doth not cast off his aged servants, nor despise their feeble attempts to promote his interest ; and who has promised that “ to old age and hoar hairs he will bear, and carry, and deliver you, and never forsake you. ” Do this out of regard to your descendants, to those whom you leave behind, and to the support of religion. Endeavour, according to the language of the Psalmist, to “ bring forth fruit even to old age, that you may flourish in the courts of the Lord ; ” that it may be said of you, as of the church of Thyatira, that “ your last works are more and better than the first. ” * Then will you shine in the double lustre of age and holiness, be the ornaments of religion, and “ come to your grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in its season. ” †

4. It is the wisdom of young persons to enter on the ways of righteousness. It is the duty of your parents, young friends, to lead you into them, and walk before you in them ; to keep you from the ways of sin, which are the ways of shame, and from the company of those who are walking in them to dishonour and ruin. I exhort them to be careful to “ train you up in the way in which you should go, that when you are old you may not depart from it, ” but have the honour of having persevered in it. Let me exhort all that are young to “ choose the way of truth, and to stick to God’s testimonies ; to remember your Creator in the days of your youth ; ” and to be sober-minded, temperate, grave, humble, and serious. For consider, you may not live to be old ; you may not have time or inclination to change your course hereafter : or if you have, it will be more difficult : or if you should, by divine grace, conquer the difficulty and become holy at last, the remembrance of youthful sins and follies will be very painful. To have devoted your best days, the strength and vigour of youth, to the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and only the dregs of your lives to God ; what a

* Rev. ii. 19.

† Job v. 26.

reproach will that be to you ! But I have very little hope of those who forget God in their youthful days. Confucius, the celebrated Chinese philosopher, observes, " He that is arrived at forty years of age, and hath hitherto been a slave to some criminal habit, is not in a condition to subdue it. I hold his malady to be incurable, and that he will persevere in his crime till death." In like manner, an elegant writer of our own observes, " Youth and manhood, not advanced age, are the proper stages of life for rectifying any wrong bent of temper. If that sun, which God hath lighted up, doth not dispel the mists and fogs of vice, before the noon of life, it is generally overcast for the whole day."* Indeed experience showeth that a vain, giddy, thoughtless young man or woman, generally makes a thoughtless, stupid, worthless old one ; and the poet's words are often verified ; " A youth of follies ; an old age of cards." Therefore I urge your speedy compliance with the call of the gospel, and your choice of God as your master, guide, and portion. This exhortation should come with peculiar force on the hearts of those who are descended from parents and ancestors renowned for piety. Consider, you who are the descendants of God's servants, what vast obligations you are under to him, for so distinguishing a privilege ; that you are accountable to him for the advantage you enjoyed by their examples, counsels, and prayers ; and that this will aggravate your disobedience and your ruin, if you forsake the God of your fathers. Consider how desirable it is, for your own sake, that you should be followers of them, as you would secure the honour of aged piety. Consider how desirable it is, for the sake of religion, that you should rise up in their room and stead, and that " the unfeigned faith, which dwelt in your pious ancestors, should dwell in you also."† Upon the whole, to use the language of the apostle, " this is my desire, that every one of you do show the same piety, diligence, and patience, to the full assurance of hope unto the end ; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises."‡ Amen.

* Seed.

† 2 Tim. i. 5.

‡ Heb. vi. 11, 12.

DISCOURSE XII.

THE JOY OF AGED AND DYING SAINTS, IN LEAVING THEIR
DESCENDANTS PROSPEROUS, PEACEFUL, AND PIOUS,
CONSIDERED.

1 KINGS i. 48.

And also thus said the king, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it.

“KNOWEST thou not this of old,” saith one of Job’s friends, “since man was placed on the earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short?” This observation is illustrated by the history of Adonijah, the son of David, of which the text is a part, and the end that was so speedily put to the authority, which he had unrighteously usurped. David had greatly erred in his conduct towards his children; especially to Adonijah, having “not displeased him at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so?” This spoiled youth, taking advantage of his father’s infirmities and confinement to his bed, “exalted himself, saying, I will be king,” and began to use some popular methods to establish his interest. He engaged Joab, the general of the king’s forces, and Abiathar, the priest, on his side. Nathan the prophet, who knew that God had appointed Solomon to succeed David in the kingdom, consults with Bathsheba his mother, to defeat the pretender’s scheme, and to set Solomon on the throne of his father. For this purpose they inform David of the plot, of the persons engaged in it, and of what fatal consequence it would be to Solomon, Bathsheba, and the peace and happiness of the kingdom, if the plot should succeed. David therefore orders that Solomon should be immediately anointed and proclaimed king: which was done, amidst the loudest acclamations of the people. Adonijah and his confederates heard the noise and shouting; and, upon inquiry into the reason of it, was informed that David had made Solomon king; that Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, had anointed him; that he was actually seated on the throne; that the old king had received the congratulations of his courtiers and officers on this occasion; and received them with the greatest pleasure and thankfulness, saying, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it.”

It may be subservient to my present design, to illustrate the favours which David here celebrates with so much pleasure and thankfulness; namely, that he had a worthy son to succeed him in the throne; and that he should have the honour to see him seated there.

David blessed God that he had given him a worthy successor. It was a satisfaction to him that he was not childless; that when, for his sin in the matter of Uriah, the sword had entered into his house, and had slain several of his children, Solomon was spared, who was the favourite of God; he having directed Nathan to call him Jedidiah, or the beloved of the Lord; and that Adonijah's conspiracy was soon and entirely defeated. David had great satisfaction in Solomon's character, as one eminently wise and good; who "loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father," and had to that day done the commandments and judgments of God;* in whom the Israelites would heartily acquiesce and rejoice, and under whose government the kingdom would be peaceful, prosperous, and happy. Further,

David blessed God that he had the singular honour to see this son seated on the throne of Israel; "Mine eyes even seeing it." The conspiracy of Adonijah showed, that the appointment of Solomon to be king, by David, and even by God himself, had little weight with men of turbulent and ambitious spirits; who after David's death might hope to set aside the succession. He therefore looked upon it as a peculiar favour of God to Israel, and especially to himself, that his throne should be filled, and the peace of his kingdom established, during his life. He had thus an additional proof of God's faithfulness to his promise, that Solomon should succeed him, enjoy a peaceful reign, and build the house of God. He had an opportunity of seeing how wisely Solomon began his reign, and how firmly the kingdom was established in his hand. Amidst all the languor of nature, David's heart rejoiced in this happy settlement, and he ascribes the praise to that God from whom promotion cometh. Let us put our souls in his soul's stead, and think, what joy it must give to a dying prince, whose love to God, to his worship, and to Israel, was so strong, to see his throne filled by so wise and worthy a successor, and the hearts of all Israel, except a few desperate men, united to him; then we shall not wonder that David, with such ardent devotion, blessed the Lord God of Israel for so happy an event.

From the words thus connected, we may naturally draw this observation;—That it is matter of great joy and thankfulness to aged Christians, when they are dying, to leave their families in prosperous and peaceful circumstances; and especially, rising up in their stead to serve God and support religion. I propose,

I. To illustrate this observation;

II. To show why such a prospect gives so much pleasure to aged saints; and then draw some useful inferences from the subject.

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 7.

I. *In order to illustrate this observation*, it may be proper and useful to observe, that it is a pleasure to an aged, dying Christian, to leave his descendants in prosperous circumstances ; it is a greater pleasure to him to leave them in peace and love ; but his greatest joy is to leave them in the way of holiness, and zealous for the interest of religion.

1. It is a pleasure to an aged, dying Christian to leave his family in prosperous circumstances. It is the character of a good man, that he is not a lover of this world, nor anxiously solicitous about future events. Nevertheless, he considers himself as obliged, by the laws of nature, reason, and the gospel, to provide for those of his own house ; not only to furnish them with the necessaries of life, while he liveth, but lay up for them such a share of its good things as he can, consistent with their present support and comfort, and the other demands which his great Lord hath upon him. He is not solicitous to heap up so much wealth for them as may be likely to make them idle, proud, and luxurious ; but only so much as may fix them comfortably in the world ; in that middle station which may be most friendly to their piety and happiness. He recollects, with pleasure and thankfulness, that God hath blessed his labour ; that his children will not be left destitute and helpless, and exposed to all the temptations of poverty. He is particularly pleased and thankful that what he leaves his family is the fruit of his honest industry ; that he hath no ill-gotten money among his substance, to bring a curse upon it ; that he hath not defrauded the king, his dealers, or workmen of their dues ; that he hath given Christ's ministers and the poor such a share of his substance as he thought in his conscience he ought to do, in proportion to the degree in which Providence hath favoured him. He is glad that, in consequence of this, his family will be likely to have the blessing of God, with which he leaves them. He rejoiceth in that declaration of Solomon, "The just man walketh in his integrity : his children are blessed after him ;"* and he dieth with a full persuasion that it will be confirmed to his children.

2. It is a greater pleasure to him to leave his descendants in unity and love. David had seen and felt much of the fatal mischiefs of discord in his own family ; but he hoped the settlement of so wise and benevolent a prince as Solomon on the throne, would establish and secure its peace. Contentions and quarrels, between whomsoever they happen, are grievous to all the sons of peace, dishonourable to religion and injurious to its power ; but between those of the same stock and family they are most shameful and pernicious. The aged saint, when he is going to the world of peace, is delighted to see his descendants peaceful and friendly ; loving as brethren ; courteous and kind

* Prov. xx. 7.

one to another. It would greatly embitter his dying moments, if he had reason to fear that after his decease they would "fall out by the way;" or, if prudence kept them from open contentions, would manifest that coldness and indifference one to another which is inconsistent with brotherly love, and would prevent their hearty concurrence in proper measures for their mutual benefit, or even the advancement of religion. But he departs in peace, when he seeth reason to believe that they will "dwell together in unity;" abound in good offices to one another; and that there will be no strife nor emulation between them, except it be that laudable one who shall do most for the honour and comfort of the family, and to promote each other's best interest.* This leads me to add,

3. It is his greatest joy to leave his descendants in the way of holiness, and zealous for the support of religion. I doubt not but David's heart exulted and gave thanks for Solomon's settlement on the throne, principally because he had all encouragement to believe that this his son would continue to walk in God's statutes as he had hitherto done, would build him a house, establish his worship, and promote truth, justice, and piety through all Israel. And next to the good hope of his own eternal salvation, there is nothing can give the heart of a pious parent higher delight than such a prospect as this. "A wise son," saith Solomon, "maketh a glad father. The father of a wise child rejoiceth in him;" especially when he is quitting the stage of life, and can do no more for the church of God than pour out his prayers for its prosperity. How is the heart of an aged dying Christian wounded, even when he hath a comfortable hope that he is entering on eternal rest, to think that he leaves wicked and graceless children behind him, degenerate plants, who, notwithstanding all his care and culture, bring forth only wild grapes; who will be the grief of the righteous, a dishonour to the family from which they spring, and to a Christian profession; and who may be instruments of corrupting others, and thus aggravating their own ruin. On the other hand, his joy and gratitude can scarcely be expressed when he seeth his children under the influence of religious principles and divine grace, "knowing the God of their fathers," and not only escaping the pollutions that are in the world through lust, but deeply concerned to secure an interest in Christ and the salvation of their souls; giving themselves to prayer, and attending diligently and seriously on the public means of grace: when he seeth them fixed in useful stations; ruling their houses well; supporting religion by their countenance and purse, and adorning it by their lives. Thus he has just reason to conclude that they are so well

* The celebrated Phillip de Mornay, Lord Plessis, said with an air of cheerfulness just before his death, "I am arrived at the height of comfort, since I die with the assurance of leaving peace among my children."

established as not to be moved from their stedfastness. In consequence of this, he can most cheerfully commit them to the divine care and faithfulness, leave them secure and happy in the friendship of God, and in the way to heaven. He can confidently adopt the dying words of Joseph to his brethren and posterity; "I die: but God will surely visit you, and bring you to the land which he hath promised."* Thus do dying saints rejoice and give thanks when they leave their descendants in easy and peaceful circumstances, and especially when they see them rising up, in their stead, to serve God and support religion. I go on to consider,

II. *Why such a prospect giveth so much joy to aged and dying Christians.*

Now this joy ariseth partly from their natural love to their descendants; but chiefly from their concern for the honour of God and Christ, and for the continuance and spread of religion; and from their expectation of meeting them again in a better world.

1. This joy ariseth, in part, from their natural love to their descendants. God hath implanted in all creatures a strong affection to their offspring, in order that they may preserve and sustain them till they are capable of providing for themselves. This natural instinct or affection is, in good men, sanctified by religion. It is under the government of a stronger and nobler principle; a principle which leads parents to consult the spiritual and eternal welfare of their offspring. The care which they take of their children is attended with great delight; and even their solicitude about them hath its pleasure. But when they have a regard to their children's happiness, not merely through natural affection, but from considering them as rational immortal creatures, capable of enjoying the greatest intellectual felicity, or liable to the most exquisite misery, and that for ever, it turns the stream of natural affection into a proper channel; and hence they have no greater joy than to see them serious and holy. Thus their children become dear to them by a stronger and more engaging tie than that of nature; even their common relation to God as their Father and Friend, and to Jesus as their Redeemer and Saviour. The real Christian, from a conviction that godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and that which is to come, urgeth his descendants, by all persuasive arguments, to follow after it; and when he seeth that, through a divine blessing, his instructions are not vain, he rejoiceth over them with great joy.

2. The concern which aged Christians feel for the honour of God and Christ, and for the continuance and spread of religion, increaseth this joy. I mention these together, because the latter

* Gen. i. 24.

is the natural necessary consequence of the former. The great object of a good man's desire is, "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ;" that his perfections may be seen and manifested in the world, especially by the spread of his glorious gospel; and that he may receive that reverence, homage, and love, which is due to him from all his rational, especially his redeemed creatures. He rejoiceth that, in order to this, God will have a succession of faithful servants in every age, and that the number of the spirits of just men made perfect will be continually increasing by colonies removed from this earth. In this view it is a pleasing reflection to him that he hath been an instrument of producing and training up a race of rational immortal beings to serve and glorify God, to improve in holiness, and ripen for eternal glory. The good man hath such an ardent affection to the Redeemer, and feels so much of the constraining influences of his dying love, that he earnestly prays for the prosperity of his church; and he labours, according to his station and ability, to promote the interest of his Lord and Saviour. In this view, he rejoiceth that his own descendants belong to Jesus; that their names were "written in the Lamb's book of life," as well as enrolled among the members of his church below; and that they are a part of that seed which serve Christ, and declare his mighty works and amazing grace to their children. The aged Christian feels so sincere and strong an affection to all his fellow-creatures whom he is leaving behind, that he delights in the prospect of religion's being supported and maintained among them. It is his heart's desire and prayer for them all, that they may be saved; that as one generation passeth away and another cometh, there may be in each a large number of holy zealous Christians, who shall be like the salt of the earth, to keep it from general corruption; or like a little leaven hid in a heap of meal, to leaven the whole mass. It is his joy to think, that, though he is dying, religion is not dying with him; that that will survive and continue in the town and neighbourhood to which he is related, and especially in his own family. He hath a cheerful hope that there will be some who may inherit his name and estate through future generations, that will uphold the cause of truth, liberty, holiness, and peace; be pillars in the house of God, and the joy of succeeding ministers in it. The more the dying Christian loveth God and his ways, his house and worship, the more pleased and thankful he is that there are those rising up in his place and stead who will have the same love and care, and be the support of religion when he is laid in the dust. But the principal ground of his joy and praise on this occasion is,

3. His prospect of meeting his pious descendants again in the heavenly world. It is a most reviving and glorious consolation which the gospel affords to dying saints, that when they part with pious friends and relatives, it is not an eternal separation;

it is indeed but a short one. For when Christ shall be revealed from heaven, there shall be “a gathering together of all his saints unto him;”* and he will so range and dispose them in the heavenly mansions, that those who were united in the bonds of pious friendship here, shall be happy in the renewed acquaintance and society of each other, and shall be ever with one another and with the Lord. What can be more cutting to a pious, tender, affectionate parent, when putting off the body, than to look on his children or other near relations, and to think, These, I fear, I shall never see more, except it be in circumstances of anguish and despair at the bar of Christ, and must bear my testimony against their obstinacy and incorrigibleness in that solemn day. But, oh, with what joy doth the dying Christian look around on his pious dutiful children, when he thinks that he shall soon meet them again in the presence of Christ, with their graces infinitely improved, and all their imperfections done away; then he shall have the honour and joy of presenting them to Christ, and saying, “Behold, here am I, and the children which thou hast graciously given me,” which I have trained up for thee; and, being redeemed by thy blood and sanctified by thy Spirit, are now meet for the inheritance of the saints in light! This inheritance I shall share with them for ever; and my joys will multiply upon me by the sight of every child that is a partaker of it. “I die,” doth he say to them, “but my God will be with you, and bring us together again to part no more.” Who can express the joy which a dying saint feels in such a prospect as this? His natural, his sanctified love to his descendants; his concerns for the honour of his God and Saviour, and for the continuance and spread of religion; and his expectation of a joyful meeting and an eternal abode with his beloved offspring in the heavenly world, lay a just foundation for his joy and thankfulness, even in death itself. I am now to conclude the subject with some useful

INFERENCES.

1. *It should be the earnest desire, and diligent care, of all parents, that they may have this joy.* What has been said on this subject should be a motive to them, to watch over the temper and education of their children with the utmost attention; that they may not have their declining years, and particularly their dying hours, embittered by painful reflections and prospects. God hath committed to you, Christian parents, immortal souls, which he requireth you to train up for him; and your own happiness very much depends on this work being well done; especially your comfort in departing from this world. Reason and daily observation tell you that you must die, and leave your family. You will then want every consolation. Sincere religion

* 2 Thess. ii. 1.

in the heart will then support it: and good men, in these circumstances, have been enabled to rejoice, that "though their houses were not so with God as they could wish, yet he hath made with them an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, which is all their salvation and all their desire." But even then their hearts have felt a mingled bitterness, when the character of their children hath been bad, or very doubtful. Let me, therefore, with the greatest seriousness, urge you to "train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" that you instruct and admonish them, as David did Solomon, to "know the God of their fathers, and serve him with an upright and willing heart." Frequently remind them what a joy it will be to you to see them truly religious; so that if they have any gratitude, any compassion, or any sense of decency, they may give you this joy, and may be and do that which will soften your dying bed. Labour to instruct and accustom them to rule their spirits and govern their passions; to live in peace, and love one another; and often inculcate upon them, "how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Let your own conduct be holy and unblameable, that no iniquity of yours may be laid up for your children;* and that they may daily see in you the amiableness and excellency of holiness. Let them observe that you are liberal to those who are in necessity, zealous to support religion, and "ready to every good deed for the house of God, and the offices thereof." This will not only be a pattern to them, but be likely to bring a blessing upon your family, instead of hurting it. "The righteous," saith David, "is ever merciful and lendeth, and his seed is blessed."† The pious Dr. Annesley, when one of his friends hinted to him that his charity was too great, considering the number of his children, answered, "You quite mistake the matter; I am laying up portions for my children." Again, be careful to support your authority in your families, and to restrain the appearance of evil, without rigour on the one hand, or excessive indulgence on the other. It is no wonder that Adonijah rebelled against God and David, when "his father had never displeased him at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so?" had never corrected nor even reproved him. To all your endeavours to promote the piety of your children, add your daily and earnest prayers to the God of all grace for his blessing upon them. Thus David prayed, "Give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart. Now, Lord, let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant." You have thus encouragement to hope that your labour will not be vain: that your children will grow up as plants of righteousness; that you will leave them behind you with much satisfaction; and that they will be your glory, joy,

* Job xxi. 19.

† Psalm xxxvii. 26.

and crown of rejoicing, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We may infer,

2. *Aged Christians who have this joy ought to be very thankful.* Bless the Lord God of Israel, as David did, that he hath given you dutiful and religious children, and spared you to be witnesses of their holy conversation. You know too much of yourselves, of human nature in its present corrupt state, and of the word of God, to ascribe the piety of your offspring to any thing peculiarly gentle and tractable in their spirits; to any uncommon prudence or skill in your instructions; to any thing remarkably engaging in your example. Even such advantages come from God, the Father of our spirits. He put an affection for them and care of them into your hearts. His Spirit opened their minds to receive religious impressions, and made your pious labours effectual for their conversion and holiness. Adore divine grace, which hath conferred such a distinguishing favour upon you. To excite and cherish your gratitude, consider how many pious parents are mourning over their Absaloms and Adonijahs; their disobedient and rebellious children. They have no other satisfaction but this; some glimmering hope, that perhaps divine grace may turn their hearts hereafter; or if not, that "their own work is with the Lord, and their reward with their God;" and that in the other world they shall be so like Christ in holiness, as to feel no more painful sensations on account of the wickedness even of their own children; but shall, with calm approbation, behold their final doom, when Christ shall bid them "depart." Such distressed Christians claim our tenderest pity and earnest prayers. Let those whom God hath honoured with pious children, and spared to see them established in the way of holiness, celebrate his loving-kindness in life and death. And let them consider all their joy on this account, as a strong obligation upon them to employ their remaining time and strength in endeavouring to promote higher degrees of piety, zeal, and usefulness, in those that shall come after them. Let me infer,

3. *It is the duty of young persons to fulfil their parents' joy.* Let them be solicitous to cherish and manifest those graces and dispositions which will afford their parents much comfort, especially when they are aged and dying. "The father of the righteous," saith Solomon, "shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice."* I might urge this upon you, young friends, by many considerations. You owe it in gratitude to God, who hath so ordered it, in the course of his providence, that you should descend from a pious stock, and enjoy innumerable advantages, which the greater part, even of the Christian world, want. You owe this in gratitude to your parents, to whom you can never

* Prov. xxiii. 24, 25.

render sufficient thanks, or perform equivalent services. Think of all the pains and sorrows which your tender and affectionate mothers have endured to bring you into the world, to nurse and rear you. Think of their many fatiguing days and sleepless nights. Think of the toils and care of your parents, through a series of years, to procure your subsistence, health, and comfort. Think of the expenses of your education; the solicitude with which they have been continually following you; the exhortations, counsels, and reproofs they have given you; and all the sighs and tears, the concern and anxiety, which you may have cost them. And will you be so unnatural, base, and cruel, as to despise all this; to render them evil for so much good; unkindness, and even hatred, for all this love, and "bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave?" Surely, you will not, cannot, be so wicked. If you are, you will be abhorred by all the wise and good;* and the great God, who hath seen all the concerns of your parents for you, "bottled all their tears,"† and registered all their exhortations and prayers in his book of remembrance, will most awfully punish you. He may, perhaps, repay you in kind, by suffering you to have undutiful and rebellious children; who may be worse than yourselves, and come to public infamy and execution, "your eyes even seeing it." He will, however, certainly make "your plagues wonderful" in the future state. Let those who have hitherto forsaken the counsel of their pious parents, and been "a heaviness of heart unto them," think on their ways, repent, and return to the Lord; that at length their parents' sorrow may be turned into joy, to see their children, who were spiritually dead, made alive, and those who were lost, found. Those of you who have chosen the way of truth, begun well, and raised the expectation of your parents, ministers, and other Christian friends, be careful that you do not disappoint us. Let not your goodness be "as the morning cloud and early dew, that passeth away;" but labour to improve in wisdom and piety, to grow in the knowledge of Christ crucified, and to live by faith in him. To this end, "be not high minded, but fear, and watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation;" that you may be more and more the joy of all that love Christ, and his cause; and especially that your parents may

* In what light the heathen considered ingratitude and disrespect to parents, may be learned from the following passage. "Knowest thou not," said Socrates, "that the republic concerns not herself with common ingratitude? But if any one be disrespectful to his parents, there is a punishment for such ingratitude; the laws reject him as an outlaw, and will not receive him into any public office. Such a one is incapable of performing any great action, or distributing justice. They who condemn their parents will be blamed and abandoned by all the world. If men see them to be ungrateful to their parents, they will not believe that they will be grateful to others. It is particularly examined, concerning candidates for offices, whether they have been respectful and grateful to their parents." Xenophon, *Memor.* lib. ii. c. 2, §. 13, 14.

† Psalm lvi. 8.

have increasing comfort in you, and may bless God for you with their dying breath. It is mentioned as an amiable part of the character of the judicious Mr. Richard Hooker, that he used to say, "If I had no other reason and motive for being religious, I would strive earnestly to be so for the sake of my aged mother, that I may requite her care of me, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy." I conclude with addressing you, in the words of Solomon, with a truly paternal tenderness and concern, "My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine."*

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE HAND OF GOD IN REMOVING OUR FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCE FAR FROM US, CONSIDERED AND IMPROVED.

PSALM LXXXVIII. 18.

Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

NEXT to the joys of religion, those of friendship are most rational, sublime, and satisfactory. But they, like all other earthly joys, have their mixtures and allays, and are very precarious. We are often called to weep with our friends, and sometimes to weep over them. Grief and tears for their death are the sad tribute we pay for loving and being beloved, and living long in this world. This seems to have been the case with the author of this melancholy psalm, where our text is. He was exercised with great afflictions of body, and deep distress of mind. "His soul was full of troubles, and his life drew nigh to the grave. He was shut up and confined by weakness and pain, and could not go forth," to his business or pleasure, to the social or solemn assembly, v. 3—8. He adds, that "he had been afflicted and ready to die from his youth up," v. 15; which seems to intimate that he was now an old man. Some of his acquaintance and friends had deserted him, and he was "become an abomination to them," v. 8. They would not assist him, nor afford him the comfort of a friendly visit, and the cheap kindness of a soft, compassionate word. Others of them, who would have been faithful and kind to him in his distress, were taken out of the world; and this at a time when, through age and infirmities, he peculiarly needed their company and assistance. To this he refers in the text; and with this he concludes the psalm, as the heaviest stroke of all; "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." This is a common case; and frequently the case of the aged. It is no

* Prov. xxiii, 15.

unusual thing for old people to outlive their nearest relations ; the companions of their lives ; their children, and sometimes their grandchildren too ; and they are, as the psalmist expresseth it, "like a sparrow alone upon the house-top." As I am now particularly addressing the aged, I propose to consider this very afflictive case ; and suggest some thoughts and advices to them, which I hope, through a divine blessing, will concur with the sorrow of the countenance, to make the heart better. I shall therefore,

I. Consider the heavy affliction with which the psalmist was visited ;

II. His devout acknowledgment of the hand of God in it ; and then, add some useful reflections from the subject.

I. *I am to consider the heavy affliction with which the psalmist was visited.*

It will be proper here to consider the persons he speaks of, and what was become of them. The persons spoken of were his "acquaintance, friends, and lovers." Man is a creature formed for society ; he could not subsist without it : or if he could would be a miserable being. There is some comfort in having what we call "acquaintance ;" especially if they are sensible, neighbourly, well-behaved persons. The common intercourse of life, visits, and conversation, have their pleasures. These tend to remove the roughness of the mind, to increase our knowledge of human nature, exercise our social affections, and promote civility and love. Even from acquaintance we may often want and derive assistance. But the original word, rendered "acquaintance" in the text, is in other places translated "kinsfolk" and "familiar friends ;" and, compared with the other words here used, sheweth that the psalmist doth not so much refer to those with whom he had a general acquaintance only, as to those to whom he was allied by blood or friendship, and for whom he had a tender affection. The ties of nature are strong and endearing. Where persons descend from the same stock, and have grown up together, there is generally a most intimate friendship formed between them. The ties of friendship, where there is no previous relation, are often more tender and strong than those of nature ; and, as Solomon observeth, "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." When persons have had long experience of each other's temper, and there hath been a free communication of counsels, joys, and griefs ; when they have, by a series of kind offices through many years, assisted one another in difficulties and perplexities, and been intent upon promoting each other's wisdom, holiness, and credit, their hearts are knit together in the strongest manner, and the principles of gratitude, honour, love, and piety confirm the union.

Such friends and relatives the psalmist had enjoyed ; and

that he enjoyed them no longer was the affliction which he so pathetically laments in the text. They were "put far from him;" removed to a distance. To lose the company of such friends is painful; for, according to an Arabian proverb, "the presence of a friend brightens the eye" and gladdens the heart. To lose their counsel and advice is painful. To be deprived of those in whose faithful breasts we could repose our secrets and our confidence; who would mildly reprove our errors and wisely direct our steps; who would remove some of our grievances by their assistance, and lighten the rest by their sympathy; who would lessen our cares and double our joys; this is to a friendly heart very grievous. It is painful to a pious mind, to lose the sight of their good works and examples; for "as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend." It keepeth his graces alive and active, and excites a laudable emulation to excel. Though our friends were so situated, by that providence which fixeth the bounds of men's habitation, that we could seldom see and converse with them, it was a pleasure and advantage to us to hear from them, and to read the friendship and piety of their hearts in their letters. To know that they were daily mindful of us in their prayers, and to have kept up the best kind of correspondence, by mutual addresses to the throne of grace for each other's welfare, tended to strengthen our mutual affection, and prevent that decay of friendship, which distance and absence are apt to occasion. To be deprived of their correspondence and prayers, is therefore another painful circumstance in their removal from us. But what chiefly afflicted the psalmist, and will afflict every generous heart, was, that his friends and lovers were removed into "darkness;" that is, to the grave, which is called in scripture, "the land of darkness and the shadow of death, without any order or succession; and where the light is as darkness."* They were put so far from him, that he could see them no more; were dead and buried out of his sight; neither would one of their friends on earth any more behold them. Thus are our friends put into darkness. The eyes that used to sparkle with pleasure, when we met after a long absence, are closed in death. The voice that used to delight and edify us is sealed up in everlasting silence. There is no conversing with them personally nor by letters. Not lands and seas divide us from them, but regions of vast, unknown space, which we cannot yet pass over; and which they cannot and indeed would not tread back, as much as they loved us. We have no way of conveying intelligence to them or receiving it from them. Perhaps they were put far from us in their youth, or in the midst of their days and usefulness; when we promised ourselves many years of pleasure in their friendship and converse, and expected many years of service from them, for their fami-

* Job x. 21, 22.

lies, for the church, and the world. Alas! one awful, fatal stroke hath broken down all the pleasing fabric of love and happiness.

But these are reflections which must not be dwelt upon. When they begin to grow very painful, as they soon will, it is time to turn our thoughts to that which is the second thing observable in the text; namely,

II. *The psalmist's devout acknowledgment of the hand of God in this affliction.*

"Thou hast put them far from me." This good man, through the whole psalm, ascribeth all his afflictions, and particularly the death of his friends, to the hand of God. He takes no notice of their diseases; he neither blames them for imprudence and delay, nor those who attended them for neglect or misapplication; but looks beyond all second causes to the great Lord of all; owns him as the supreme sovereign of every life, and disposer of every event. And we shall do well to make this idea of the blessed God familiar to our minds, as it is at once most instructive and most comfortable.

The holy scriptures confirm the dictates of reason upon this subject; assuring us that God maketh peace and createth evil; that "out of the mouth of the Lord proceedeth evil and good;" that the most casual events are under his direction, so that "not a sparrow falleth to," nor lighteth on, "the ground without him;" much less do his rational creatures and children die without his notice and appointment. By whatever disease or casualties they die, it is God who "taketh away their breath, changeth their countenance, and sendeth them into darkness." With awful majesty God claimeth this as his prerogative; "Behold I, even I, am He; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any who can deliver out of my hand."* He removeth our friends who hath a right to do it. They were our friends, but they are his creatures; and may he not do what he will with his own? He gave them life of his free goodness, and he hath a right to demand it when he pleaseth. Dear as they were to us, we must acknowledge they were sinners; and, as such, had forfeited their lives to the justice of God: and shall not he determine when to take them away? They were our friends; but do we not hope and believe that, by repentance, faith in Christ, and sanctifying grace, they were become his friends too; dear to him by many indissoluble ties? Hath he not then a superior claim to them, and a greater interest in them? Is it not fit that he should be served first? May he not call home his friends when he pleaseth? Shall he wait for, or ask, our consent first? He doth it, whom we cannot, dare not, gainsay. "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou?"† He doth it, who is infinitely good

* Deut. xxxii. 39.

† Job ix. 12.

and wise; and doth every thing in the best time and manner. His knowledge is perfect and unerring; his goodness boundless and never-failing. Though his judgments are a great deep, and his schemes utterly unsearchable by us; yet we may reasonably believe that he consulteth the happiness of his servants in what is most mysterious and most grievous; and his word giveth us the strongest assurance of it. So that whether we exercise the faith of Christians or the reason of men, we must acknowledge the hand of God, yea, his wisdom and goodness, in removing our acquaintance into darkness. Thus have we considered the psalmist's affliction in the loss of his friends, and his devout acknowledgment of the hand of God in it. Let us now attend to those natural and useful reflections which these particulars suggest to us; and may God, by his Spirit, deeply impress them upon our hearts!

APPLICATION.

1. *The case here described is a very pitiable one.* It claims the compassion of all pious and generous minds. It is a very great affliction to be deprived of those whose souls were formed for friendship; in whom we saw more and more goodness as our intimacy increased; and with whom we exchanged so many endearments. It is an affliction which the most worthy, tender minds are most sensible of and affected with. It seemed to touch our blessed Lord as deep as any other, for he wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. When such a stroke cometh upon those who, like Heman, are advanced in years, and have their natural strength weakened by infirmities, it is peculiarly grievous; so that they may adopt the lively words of the pious Mr. Herbert; "Thou takest away my health—and more,—for my friends die." They think it too late in life to form new friendships; or if they do, they seldom relish them so well as the old. The cares and anxieties, the many painful alarms and fears, which some, whose friends have been put far from them, have felt for weeks, and perhaps months, previous to the separating stroke, render them less able to bear it; their own bodily strength and mental vigour being weakened thereby. In every case of this kind the sufferers are great objects of pity. Let us put our souls "in their souls' stead;"* enter tenderly into their afflicted cases; weep with them that weep, and pray earnestly for them, that they may have those divine supports and consolations which alone can "revive them when they walk through so great a trouble."† Let us likewise assist and comfort them as far as we are able; and thus, by bearing one another's burdens, imitate the example and fulfil the law of Christ.

2. *Let us bless God for the friends we have had, and all the comfort we enjoyed in them.* It is our duty as Christians, "in

* Job xvi. 4.

† Psalm cxxxviii. 7.

every thing to give thanks;" and the death of our friends is not an excepted case. When persons are sick and in pain, they are apt to forget the years of health and ease with which they have been favoured. So, when we lose our friends we are apt to forget how long a time we enjoyed them, and what comfort we had in them. Or if we think of this, I fear it is more to increase the melancholy pleasure of grief than to promote our thankfulness. But surely it becometh us to bless God who gave us agreeable relations and faithful friends; gave us to see and own their worth, and united our hearts in a sincere and strong affection. There is likewise much reason for thankfulness that we enjoyed them so long; that our friendship was not dissolved when it was just cementing, and we were beginning to taste the sweetness and find the benefits of it. We should most thankfully adore the Fountain of all good, for the great comfort and pleasure we have had in them, that we have been witnesses of their wise, pious, steady behaviour, in several relations and circumstances of life; that they were persons whom (to use an expression of Dr. Young) "we might venture to dip into below the surface, without fearing that our good opinion would be lessened by our curiosity." Let us likewise be thankful, that there have been no contentions or differences, no coldness or shyness between us; that we have no acts of unkindness to reproach ourselves with, and that our endearing friendship hath not been, perhaps once, interrupted. Let us give God the glory of what was excellent and lovely in our departed friends, and praise him for all the pleasure and advantage we enjoyed by them: for every creature is that to us which he is pleased to make it, and no more.

3. *Let us humbly submit to the will of God when he putteth our friends far from us.* "I was dumb," saith the psalmist, "I opened not my mouth," to complain or murmur, "because thou didst it."* God doth it, and there cannot be a more forcible reason, not merely for a patient submission, but a cheerful acquiescence. Let me remind you that he hath a right to do it, and is just, wise, and kind in all he doth. He, we hope, saw them ripe for heaven; and judged that the proper, the best time to remove them to it. Perhaps he hath taken them away from the evil to come. We cannot look into futurity; but he who can might foresee that, if they had continued longer upon earth, some temptation would have attacked them too strong for their resolution, or some affliction would have befallen them too heavy for their fortitude. He might foresee that their comfort in relative life would have been embittered, and their future days filled with sorrow. And could we have desired their lives to be lengthened out under such disadvantages? The aged Christian is often lamenting and

* Psalm xxxix. 9.

saying, "I want my dear consort and children to be the support and comfort of my declining and infirm years." But can you be sure that, instead of being so, they might not have increased your griefs and infirmities, and that God was not kind to you in taking them away? Among many considerations which might be urged to promote our submission, let us carefully attend to the following. Though our pious friends are put far from us, they are removed near to God, their heavenly Father and best friend. They are not gone down to destruction, nor have they lost their being. What chiefly rendered them lovely in our eyes was of an immortal nature, and cannot be lost. They reckoned nearness to God and communion with him their supreme felicity on earth; and they now enjoy it without interruption. They are "absent from the body, and present with the Lord." Though, with regard to us, they are removed "into darkness," yet they are gone into the world of light. Their separate spirits are still in a state of thought and activity, and do not sleep with the body till the resurrection. They are departed from us, but they are "with Christ, which is far better." They are gathered to their friends who went before them, with whom they often took sweet counsel together, and conversed of the place where they now are, the work in which they are engaged, and the blessedness which they enjoy. They have got better acquaintance and friends than those whom they left behind, even "an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect." They are got beyond the boundaries of Satan's kingdom, and out of the reach of sin, distress, and fear. They possess "the inheritance of the saints in light. The Lord God is their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning are ended." Further, it will help to reconcile our minds to this affliction to consider, that though our friends are far from us our God is not. He is near to us, a sure and faithful friend, "a very present help in trouble." Though some of the streams fail the fountain flows, and will for ever flow. By his providence and gracious presence he can fill up the room of a departed creature, and amply make up, what is one of the most pressing wants of mortals, the want of a friend. He can be better, every way better, to us and ours, than any creature which he hath taken from us. Finally, we are going after our departed friends, and shall be with them shortly. With this thought David supported his mind on the death of his child; "I shall go to him, but he shall not return unto me." They have left us struggling with temptations, infirmities, and sorrows; and the struggle is harder, as we are deprived of their example and assistance; but it will not be long. We hope soon to be with them; to see them, know them, and converse with them, on terms of great advantage; without any prejudice, passion, jealousy, mistake, sus-

picion, or any thing that may lessen our pleasure in each other. Yea, we "shall be ever with them and the Lord." In the mean time let us consider, that, strictly speaking, death doth not dissolve pious friendship, any more than a short absence on earth; nay, it scarce interrupts or suspends it. We still love and are beloved by our departed friends; and this is the essence of friendship. They are not unmindful of us in the world to which they are gone; and though we cannot see them, we may be often reviewing their pleasing and instructive image in our hearts, and holding communion with them by faith, devotion, and hope. Let these considerations engage us humbly to acquiesce in the will of God; yea, to say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

4. *Let us be careful and diligent to make a due improvement of such afflictions.* By removing our friends, God designeth to seal instruction upon our souls; and let us be solicitous to learn it. Let our departed friends still live in our memory, honour, and affection. Let us defend their reputation, and assist and comfort the surviving branches of their families. Let us carefully recollect and consider what was excellent and praiseworthy in them, as every good man hath some peculiar distinguishing excellencies, and let us imitate them. For instance; were they eminently pious and holy; strict in observing the sabbath; lovers of reading, meditation, and prayer; zealous for the support of religion; respectful and grateful to the ministers of Christ; faithful in the discharge of domestic duties? Were they frugal of their time, not eating the bread of idleness; charitable to the poor; compassionate to those who were in distress? Did they act in life not only with unblameable integrity, but with the strictest equity, honour, and candour, and adorn their Christian profession by a meek, gentle, and cheerful spirit? Let us labour to transcribe these graces and qualities into our hearts and practice, from the fair copy which we have seen, and go and do likewise. Let us follow them in the path of Christian duty, obedience, and zeal; endeavour to supply their lack of service, and be quickened to do so much the more good, because their time and opportunity are ended. Let us particularly learn, from their removal, to be dead to this world. Are our friends and acquaintance put far from us? Let it wean our hearts from this earth, where we shall be often losing something or other, till we have lost our earthly all. Let us not think so much of dead friends in the grave, as of living friends and living saints in heaven. Let us think in what way they obtained the glorious reward; that we may "not be slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises." Then will their death advance our spiritual life and comfort, and make us more meet for an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and

that fadeth not away. Thus our excellent moral poet describeth the effect which the death of our friends should have upon us;

Our dying friends come o'er us like a cloud,
To damp our brainless ardours, and abate
That glare of life, which often blinds the wise.
What saith this transportation of my friends?
It bids me love the place where now they dwell,
And scorn this wretched spot they leave so poor.

————— Thus smitten friends
Are angels sent on errands full of love:
For us they languish, and for us they die:
And shall they languish, shall they die, in vain? *

5. *Let us be thankful for our friends yet living, and faithfully perform our duty to them.* Let us praise God, that all our friends and lovers are not put far from us; that though we have been visited with breach upon breach, and sorrow upon sorrow, and may have survived most of our friends; yet we are not quite desolate. Though many channels of pleasure are dried up, others are yet open. Our surviving friends do not, like Heman's, desert us when we want their sympathy and assistance most; but still love us, and are ready to pity, comfort, and serve us. We are indebted for this to a kind providence, which, in the midst of judgment, remembers mercy. Let us be careful to put a due value upon our living friends. There have been instances of persons who have grieved so much for the loss of one relation or friend, that they could take no comfort in those that were left; could never rejoice with them, nor so much as look cheerful any more. Such a conduct is very ungrateful to God, highly indecent in itself, very unkind to surviving friends, and extremely injurious to the mourners themselves. Because God hath put one friend far from them, they themselves put away all the rest; and then perhaps are frequently complaining that they have not a friend left. It is our wisdom and duty to maintain such a command of our passions, and such a respect and affection for our remaining friends, that their friendship may, in some degree at least, make up the want of what we have lost. Let us show ourselves friendly to them, cheerful with them, thankful for their visits, tender of their comfort and reputation, and diligent in serving them. Let us rejoice with them in their prosperity, sympathize with them under their sorrows, and, in a word, "love them as our own souls."† Further, let us make the best improvement of our friendships, since we see how precarious they are. Let our converse and correspondence be serious and edifying, that we may administer grace to one another. Let us strengthen one another's hands in God, and serve one another in love, especially in our best interests. If our consciences accuse us of any neglect in these branches of duty, with regard to those friends who are put from us, let

* Night Thoughts.

† 1 Sam xviii. 1.

us be more cautious and active in performing them to those who survive. Finally, while we are taking comfort in our friends, let us remember they are dying comforts; that however dear they are to us, a parting time will come, and may come very soon. The apostle sets before us the great lessons we are to learn from this reflection; "The time is short. They who have wives should be as though they had none; they that weep, as though they wept not; they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; for the fashion of this world passeth away."* If we act upon these advices, the separating stroke will be less painful; and a foundation will be laid for an eternal friendship in the heavenly regions, in which there will be no danger of separation or interruption any more. I only add,

6. *Let us make sure of a Friend who will never leave us*; even the almighty and everlasting God. Many signal honours were conferred upon Abraham; but this was the greatest, that "he was called the friend of God."† If God be not our friend, we shall be inevitably miserable, if all the princes of the earth were our friends. The common relation of pious friends to the blessed God, in and through Jesus Christ the bond of union, addeth the chief joy to their mutual friendship. Let me exhort and urge those, who are enemies to God in their minds by wicked works, to renounce their enmity, and return to him by sincere repentance. Let me beseech them to "acquaint themselves with God and be at peace; and so good shall come unto them." But let them remember that Jesus Christ is the only way of access to the Father; that through faith in his atoning blood, peace may be made, and through his mediation a delightful lasting friendship established between a holy God and penitent believers. No other friend can appease a guilty conscience, heal a distempered mind, compose and cheer a troubled spirit, ease a dying body, and make happy a departed soul. "In his favour is life; and in his presence is fulness of joy." Let good men value the friendship of God as their highest honour and happiness; keep it inviolate, and live and die upon it. If earthly relations and friends die and forsake you, it is your misfortune; but if God forsakes you, it is your fault; for "the Lord is with you while you are with him."‡ Let it be your care and ambition to love him with all your heart, to live always near to him, and maintain communion with him. View him every day in his works; converse with him in his word and ordinances; correspond with him by prayer and thanksgiving; plead his cause; espouse his interest; love and serve all his friends; and, in a word, live to his glory. Let our repeated and painful experience of the vanity, uncertainty, and insufficiency of the creature, lead us more and more to the fulness and all-sufficiency of the Creator. We have need of great caution,

* 1 Cor. vii. 29.

† James ii. 23.

‡ 2 Chron. xv. 2.

lest our earthly friends should draw away our hearts from God, or engross that place in them which should be kept sacred for him. Let it be our habitual care to “keep ourselves in the love of God;” and then all things, not excepting the removal of our dearest friends, shall work together for our good. Then we shall have just reason to believe that, when they are put far from us, our heavenly Friend will manifest himself to us by some special, delightful tokens of his presence and love; as the Lord appeared to Abraham and gave him some very gracious promises, after that Lot was separated from him.* Thus may we rejoice, when we are left alone, desolate, and afflicted, as in such circumstances our Lord was: “Behold ye shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”† In short, all earthly enjoyments are very precarious; and you may see reason to say, with a celebrated statesman, “All things else forsake me, besides my God, my duty, and my prayer.”‡ May the Fountain of mercies and the God of all comfort pour the balm of divine and everlasting consolation into bleeding mourning hearts; and enable his aged saints in particular, who are left destitute, not only to be patient in tribulation, but to rejoice evermore, and in every thing to give thanks: and they have the highest reason to do so; for he, who is faithful, unchangeable, and keepeth covenant for ever, hath said, “I will never, never leave thee; I will never, never, never forsake thee.”§

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE ASSURANCE OF REST AND FUTURE GLORY GIVEN TO AGED DANIEL CONSIDERED.

DANIEL XII. 13.

But go thou thy way, till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

It was said of Daniel, by an angel of the Lord, that he was “a man greatly beloved:”|| and one evident and remarkable proof of it was the assurance given him in the text, of the happiness which God had in reserve for him. Many extraordinary discoveries had been made to him of the principal events that were to happen to the church and world, to the end of time. In the beginning of this chapter he is informed of what is to succeed the end of the world; even the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the everlasting states of the righteous and wicked. Some hints were given him as to the times when these events should happen. The prophet did not understand them

* Gen. xiii. 14. † John xvi. 32. ‡ Sir John Mason. § Heb. xiii. 5, Gr. || Dan. x. 11.

(v. 8), and therefore desired to be more particularly informed concerning them. But he is told by the person that appeared to him, who seems to have been our Lord Jesus Christ, that they would not be fully understood, till the accomplishment explained them. And he is cut short with this assurance, which was abundantly sufficient and satisfactory, that whatever was the state of the church and the world, his own state should be happy. He must therefore attend to his duty, wait God's time, and comfort himself with these pleasing prospects. As Daniel was now about ninety years of age, the text will furnish out some advices and consolations suited to the circumstances of my aged and honoured friends, whom I am this day to address. And I shall,

- I. Consider the charge given to Daniel; and,
- II. The encouragement set before him.

I. *I am to consider the charge given to Daniel.*

"Go thy way, till the end be." Most commentators understand this as a dismissal from life; Now thou hast leave to depart out of the world. But upon this interpretation, it is not easy to see the meaning of that expression, "till the end be." And therefore I prefer the interpretation of Grotius and others, who consider it as a charge to him, to attend to his proper business, to the duties of his station and age, till the end of his life; for the original word hath that signification in many places; particularly where David saith, "Lord, make me to know my end, that I may know how frail I am."* It may perhaps be intended also as a discharge from his public office as a prophet. Go thy way; thou shalt receive no more such visions and revelations of the Lord, as thou hast been favoured with. He had perhaps been too curious and inquisitive about the time when those events should take place which had been revealed to him (v. 8), therefore the Lord said unto him (v. 9), "Go thy way, Daniel;" which he repeats in the text. This may be a general admonition, not to be too inquisitive about those matters; but return to and mind the business of his place and station; to perform his duty as a servant of God, and to the king's business, as one of his ministers and statesman. He had been very faithful and zealous in both capacities; had earnestly sought the honour of God, the good of Israel, and the welfare of the Chaldeans. He is here therefore directed to persevere in those duties which his age and circumstances would permit him to discharge. The expression may particularly refer to his being patient and contented in the troublous times in which he lived, and under the afflictions and infirmities he endured. The Greek version renders the words, "Go thy way and be at rest;" be content with that station and condition to which God hath appointed thee. Be not

* Psalm xxxix. 4.

discomposed by any troubles that may affect thee and thy people; or by the foresight of those which shall happen to the nation in future years; but patiently wait and prepare for thy latter end, and do not complain of the length and tediousness of thy pilgrimage. Go on faithfully and cheerfully through that portion of life which yet remaineth to thee. To excite him to this, the Lord gives him the most kind and extensive promise, even an assurance of future everlasting blessedness. And this is the second thing to be considered :

II. *The gracious encouragement set before him.*

“For thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” Now here are three things promised him; a peaceful retreat in the grave; a glorious resurrection from it; and a happy portion in the heavenly world.

1. He is promised a peaceful retreat in the grave. “Thou shalt rest.” This, I think, evidently refers to his death. Thou shalt die in peace, and enter upon a state of rest. And this is a common description of the death of good men in scripture, and well suited to their circumstances here. It implies, that the present is a state of trouble and disquietude; that “man who is born of a woman is full of trouble.” Little rest is to be expected here. Sorrows succeed one another with few and short intervals, and sometimes continue almost uninterrupted for months and years together. Good men, and good ministers in particular, have their peculiar troubles; and these Daniel had experienced. But they shall rest. Their bodies shall rest in the grave, and their souls shall rest with God. Their bodies shall rest in the grave. So Job, speaking of it, saith, “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.”* And Isaiah saith of the righteous, “He shall enter into peace, they shall rest in their beds.”† They shall be entirely free from what is opposite to rest; from whatever may give pain and uneasiness to the soul. The body shall then have no wants to supply. No pain or uneasiness shall attack it; and though it corrupts in the grave, it is insensible of it, and the separate spirit does not feel it, nor is affected by the knowledge of it. The good man rests from those labours which make him faint and weary; and from all his troubles and sorrows occasioned by the afflictions and the wickedness of others. He fears not for his relations; he weeps not for his friends. The terrors of the world, persecution, reproach, and ridicule for his piety, never disturb his peaceful repose. He that is dead in Christ is freed from the acts of sin; from all temptations to it; from all concern and remorse about it. Though the power of sin is broken by renewing and sanctifying grace, it will disturb his peace while he is in the body. On this account, the best and holiest

* Job iii. 17.

† Isaiah lvii. 2.

men are in some measure in a restless condition. But when he hath put off the body of sin and death, his conflict and his uneasiness cease. But further, their souls shall rest with God. The former is a kind of negative happiness; the rest of a dead brute, that feels and fears nothing. But the rest we are speaking of is the rest of a being that still exists, a rational, active spirit; that is not destroyed and lost, but only retired from the world. The rational, sanctified soul cannot be easy in a mere freedom from pain and sorrow. It wants something suited to its nature; that will satisfy and fill its desires; and this it finds in God; to whom it returns, as to its rest, and portion, and happiness. It experiences the highest acquiescence and delight in the presence of God; for there is fulness of joy. The rest of the soul doth not imply its sleep; it being in an insensible state. It never sleeps while in the body, and it would be strange if it should sleep when out of it. No; when "absent from the body," it is "present with the Lord." It "departs and is with Christ, which is far better," and lives to him. "There remaineth a rest to the people of God," saith the apostle; the word is, "the keeping of a sabbath," which is not an indolent repose (though too many make it so), but a holy, devout, praising, active rest; the employment of all its faculties upon God; delightfully reviewing and reflecting upon what he does for it. The good man is happy in his favour and enjoyment, in the communications of his love; in the exercises of devout admiration, love, and joy; and in the returns of homage and praise to his great benefactor. All this is attended with joyful reflections on what is yet to come; the prospect of greater honour and felicity at the resurrection, and their continuance for ever. Thus saith the psalmist, "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness;"* which leads me to add,

2. Daniel is promised a glorious resurrection from the grave. "Thou shalt rest, and at the end of the days stand in thy lot;" intimating, that this rest in the grave was to continue to the end of the days, and that he was then to stand in his lot. In this sense the Jewish and most Christian interpreters understand it. In verse 2, he had been told, that when Michael the great prince, that is Christ, appeared, "those that slept in the dust of the earth should awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." The end of the days, therefore, refers to the resurrection. Here then let us observe, that days shall have an end. Not only Daniel's days, and mine, and yours, but all days, shall come to a period. Hence we often read of "the last days." The revolution of seasons shall cease. The sun and moon, those faithful measurers of time, shall be destroyed. Time itself shall be no longer; but days and time be all

* Psalm xvii. 15.

swallowed up in eternity. Then Daniel, with the rest of God's faithful servants, shall arise and stand upon the earth. When the stormy weather is all over, when the noise of the earth ceases, and the distress of nations is at an end; then the Sun of righteousness shall arise in brighter glory upon this dark world, and his lustre shall rouse all that sleep in the dust. Their long rest shall be broken; and saints shall awake to everlasting life; not as formerly, after the repose of the night, to the same cares, and pains, and sorrows; the same doubts and fears, temptations and corruptions, or greater: but to everlasting health and vigour, holiness and joy. Thus Job saith, "Man lieth down, and riseth not till the heavens be no more. But then God will remember them, and raise them out of their sleep; he will call them out of the dust, and they will answer him; and he will have a desire to the work of his hands."* Their bodies shall rise and stand on the earth, glorious and honourable; and they will "lift up their heads with joy, knowing that their redemption draweth nigh." Once more,

3. Daniel is promised a happy portion in the heavenly world.

It had been said (v. 2), "Some shall rise to everlasting life." And here, "Thou shalt stand in thy lot." The portion of good men hereafter is called their "lot," in allusion to the division of Canaan by lot, when the tribes and families of Israel had their respective shares and inheritances in it; and so the word "lot" is used to signify any state or condition which God hath assigned to men, whether in this or the future world. Now, the expression in the text intimates, that there shall be a day of judgment, when every man shall be tried, and have his lot publicly assigned him; not by chance, but by the perfect wisdom and rectitude of the supreme Judge, according to what he was, and had done, while in the body. It may intimate further, that good men shall "stand" in that judgment; and not, like the wicked, flee to hide themselves from the presence of their judge. And the text may be illustrated by what David saith, "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation," or assembly, "of the righteous."† They have "boldness in the day of judgment." When he shall appear, they shall have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.‡ Further, the expression of "standing in his lot," intimates that there shall be different lots or portions assigned to good men, according to the degree of their holiness and usefulness here. Daniel had his lot, and other good men had theirs. "Every man shall receive his own reward for his own labours." Their glory shall be proportioned to their piety, faithfulness, and zeal. So it is said in verse 3, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever," with greater brightness.

* Job xiv. 15.

† Psalm i. 5.

‡ John ii. 28, iv. 87.

They who have distinguished themselves by their piety, zeal, and benevolence for a long course of years, shall be promoted to the highest and brightest of those mansions which Christ is preparing in his Father's house. Once more ; it shall be an abiding felicity. This may be meant by the phrase "standing in his lot," as the word signifies standing fast, so as not to be removed. Their lot is fixed and determined by the Almighty, and therefore cannot be changed. So we read in verse 3, of "shining as the stars for ever and ever." Earthly substances are transitory ; but this is "a better, an enduring substance." Earthly inheritances are not for ever ; but the heavenly one is "incorruptible and fadeth not away." The brighter discoveries of the New Testament assure us of the eternity of the happiness of the saints. Their lot is to "appear with Christ in glory ;" to "walk with him in white robes ; to behold his glory, and be for ever with him." He appoints to them their lot, "even an everlasting kingdom, as his Father has appointed unto him." Let us review the gracious encouragement given to Daniel in his old age. God promiseth him a peaceful retreat from this world ; that his body should rest in the grave, and his soul rest and be happy with God ; that at the resurrection he should return to this world and appear in a glorious form ; and that he should have a happy lot, inheritance, and portion, in the heavenly world. This blessedness God hath promised to all his faithful servants. Let me now show you to what practical purposes this subject is to be improved.

APPLICATION.

1. *See the necessity of securing a happy lot for ourselves.* Observe, my brethren, how kindly God treats his servants ; how comfortably he speaks to them ; how well he provides for them ; and therefore how desirable it is to be of their number. Our end is drawing on apace. Our days and years will soon come to a period. The end of every year, every month, every week, yea, every day, naturally reminds us of death, which is "the end" of all men. The living ought, therefore, to lay it to heart ; and it must be inexcusable folly and stupidity not to reflect upon it ; especially as our end may come suddenly, and before we expect it. But you well know that death is not the end of your being. The body rests and moulders in the grave, but what then becomes of the soul ? Solomon tells us, "When the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it." It enters on a new scene of being ; goes to an abiding place ; an unchangeable state. If thy lot then be good and happy, it will be always so. If it be bad, it will never change for the better. Those who are in Christ "die in the Lord and rest from their labours, and their works follow them." And at the great day Christ shall bring them with him, and give them the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the

earth. But the men of the world have their portion in this life ; they die in their sins, and go to the place of torment. Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, are their lot. " Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest : this shall be the portion of their cup."* They had their lot of good things in this life, and God's people their evil things ; but they shall be comforted and sinners tormented. It ought, therefore, to be your greatest care to secure a happy lot hereafter ; and this must be chosen and pursued now. God doth not bestow eternal happiness by chance ; but upon those who are qualified for it by complying with the terms of the gospel, and living godly in Christ Jesus. You must be, as the apostle expresseth it, " made meet," or fit, " for the inheritance of the saints in light,"† or to have a portion or share of their inheritance, as the word signifies. If you desire to have Daniel's happy lot, you must live like him ; and let me remind you what manner of man he was, and how he lived. He was eminent for his early piety, his diligent study of the scriptures, and fervent devotion. He was zealous for God and religion ; immoveably firm and resolute in the midst of a wicked generation ; and chose rather to die in the lions' den, than to displease God, and act against his conscience. You may not be called to his trials ; but if you are not faithful and steady in less, you will never stand in greater. " Work out, then, your own salvation with fear and trembling." " If sinners entice you, consent not ; if they say, Cast in thy lot among us,"‡ reject the proposal with abhorrence. For if you have your lot with them here, you will have it with them hereafter. Let it be your care to secure an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose hand is the final lot of mortals, and to live by faith in him ; that when he shall appear you may have confidence. Give all diligence to prepare for your latter end, for it may come unawares. " Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching."

2. *Let the servants of God attend to the charge given to Daniel ;* especially those who, like him, are in the decline of life ; and learn their duty from it. To you, fathers, I would respectfully address, and exhort you to " go your way ;" to retire, as much as may be, from the world. You are not, indeed, to leave your occupations and stations while God gives you capacities for business, and your circumstances or families need your application to it. But what I mean is, that you should retire, as much as you can, from the hurry and fatigue of business and company. " The fashion of this world passeth away." The world itself is growing old and dying, and your end will quickly come. Go away, then, and rest. Death will be very grievous to those who have always been bustling in the world, and fond of

* Psalm xi, 6.

† Col. i. 12.

‡ Prov. i. 10—14.

company, and have not been used to retire for sober, serious thoughts. You must die alone, and not one of your friends will go with you through the dark valley. Retire, then, and "commune with your own hearts;" reflect on what you have seen, and heard, and read, of divine things; and acquaint yourselves more with God, and Christ, and the eternal world to which you are going. "How long have I to live," saith good old Barzillai, "that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?"* Go to court? Alas, it is time for me to think of dying, and going to rest. Let not the world tire your strength and exhaust your spirits, but keep them for the best things. Be not too solicitous to know what God is doing, or will do, in the world; but see that your own work be well done, and that you are daily getting more ready for your end and change. Be patient and contented with your present condition; and be careful to avoid the detestable character which the apostle Jude gives of some professing Christians whom he calls "murmurers and complainers;"† or, as the word signifies, persons who find fault with the lot assigned them. To prevent this, reflect upon your prospects as Christians, and "hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." In a word, "the end of all things is at hand; be sober, and watch unto prayer. Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." This leads me to add,

3. *Let aged saints comfort themselves with the prospect of this happiness* promised to Daniel; for it is the lot of all God's faithful servants. Though Daniel was at a loss to understand his own prophecies, yet it was sufficient for him to know that God intended for him a safe and peaceful retreat, a glorious resurrection, and a happy portion in the eternal world. The New Testament throws a light upon these promises, and gives us brighter and fuller discoveries than Daniel had; that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope. Your end is drawing nigh. Your daily infirmities remind you that it is very near. When that comes you will rest. God will hide you from all pains, and cares, and sorrows, in the grave, and conduct your separate spirits to your Father's house. When soul and body are just parting, you may cheerfully say, as the pious Mr. Matthew Mead did in that circumstance, "I am going home, as every honest man should when his work is done: and I bless God I have a good home to go to." To an eye of faith it matters little what your lot here is; where you live; what your condition is; how you are treated by the world; or where you die and are buried. You have a happy lot, on which you are just entering; purchased by the blood of Christ, and ensured by the promise of that God who cannot lie. Live then upon these encouragements; and when your afflictions and burdens

* 2 Sam. xix. 34.

† Jude 16.

increase, let this be your language; "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance, and of my cup; he maintaineth my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage."* Let the believing prospect of this assist you to bear the calamities of life with fortitude and cheerfulness, and make you willing to go and possess your inheritance. Let your last days be spent in habitual thankfulness for these consolations and hopes. Gratefully own your obligations to God and the Redeemer for the discoveries of the gospel, the operations of the Spirit upon your hearts, and any good hope through grace which you enjoy. Thus live and die as penitent believers at the foot of the cross; rejoicing in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in yourselves, and looking for the mercy of your adorable Redeemer, unto eternal life. So the pious and zealous Mr. John Knox said on his death bed, "Satan hath been now seeking to persuade me that my fidelity and labours in the ministry have merited heaven. But blessed be God who brought to my mind those two scriptures, 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' and, 'Not I, but the grace of God with me.'" Another pious minister in the like circumstances, being told by a friend that he was going to receive his reward, answered, "Brother, I am going to receive mercy." Finally, pray earnestly that God would, by his Spirit, speak to your hearts those good and comfortable words which he spoke to aged Daniel; that he would witness with your spirits that this is your lot, and give you some delightful foretastes of the inheritance.

I conclude with expressing my best wishes and prayers for you in the words of the apostle; "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost."† Amen.

* Psalm xvi. 5, 6.

† Rom. xvi. 13.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

OR

THREE DISCOURSES

ON

I. PROFITABLY HEARING THE WORD. II. JOINING IN PUBLIC PRAYER, AND
III. SINGING THE PRAISES OF GOD.

“God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit
and in truth.”—JOHN IV. 24.

P R E F A C E.

“It is not always without good effect,” saith a celebrated writer,* “that men of proper qualifications write in succession on the same subjects. For the same ideas may be delivered more intelligibly, or more delightfully, by one than by another; or with attractions that may allure minds of a different form. No writer pleases all; and every writer may please and profit some.” Upon these principles, the public is presented with the following discourses; the subjects of which will be allowed to be of great importance to promote the interests of real religion. That the advices and admonitions contained in them are much wanted, is alas! too apparent, from the little effect which public worship appears to have upon the generality of those who attend it. There were six sermons on each of these subjects, first preached at a lecture at the Weigh-house in London by some eminent ministers there,† about sixty years ago, and afterwards published. Another set on reading the scriptures followed them, and it was intended to publish two sets more on Baptism and the Lord’s supper. As those subjects were handled with great judgment, clearness, and seriousness, and by preachers of considerable note in their day, it is surprising that they met with no better a reception at the time of their publication, and are so little known in the world. I know not how to account for this, without throwing a reflection upon the taste and character of that generation, but by supposing that the unhappy controversies which arose soon after their publication, relating to the doctrine of the Trinity, and which prevented this useful design from being completed, diverted the attention of the public from what had been published. Thus, as one of them expresseth it, “the abomination that maketh desolate was brought in among them.” And indeed men in general are prone to pay more attention to points of doubtful disputation, than to what is indisputable, practical, and useful; and they had rather read and quarrel about the minutiae of controversies, which none of them can understand, than enter heartily into the knowledge, life, and practice of true religion.

The following discourses are upon a like plan; and contain advices and directions relating to the several parts of public worship, and well suited

* Dr. Johnson.

† Viz. Drs. Grosvenor, Harris, and Earl, and Messrs. Reynolds, Newman, and Bradbury.

to the common case of Christians, amidst their different sentiments on controverted points, and the different forms in which they worship. In these directions they have all a great and interesting concern. These are reduced to so small a compass, and placed I hope in so plain and strong a light, as to be suited to the capacities and circumstances of almost all who attend religious assemblies. If my brethren in the ministry should think them worthy of their notice, and adapted to Christian edification, I presume they will recommend them to their respective congregations; for their sakes, that they may be improving in knowledge and holiness by Christian worship and ministerial instructions, and for their own sakes also, that they may be instrumental in doing more good than they can possibly do while their hearers do not pay a greater regard to the manner in which they attend and join in public worship, and the ends which they ought to propose to themselves by it. The good effect which I have reason to believe these sermons, through the divine blessing, produced in some, to whom they were addressed from the pulpit, encourageth me to hope that they are calculated for general usefulness; this hath led me to comply with the request of several of my friends to publish them in a cheap form, that they may be likely to have a more extensive spread. May that God who loveth the gates of Zion, succeed this attempt to promote a more diligent improvement of the worship and services of our religious assemblies! Amen.

DISCOURSE I.

DIRECTIONS FOR PROFITABLY HEARING THE WORD.

2 TIMOTHY II. 7.

Consider what I say ; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

It is painful to every serious mind, especially to every faithful minister, to observe what little apparent good is done by the public worship of God ; how much ignorance of divine things, how many irregularities of temper and conduct, are to be found among those who regularly and decently attend it. It is worth our while to inquire to what this is owing. You believe, I am persuaded, brethren, that the public worship of God is a reasonable service, and that it is also a divine institution. A Being of infinite wisdom could never appoint means that were not in their own nature fitted to answer the intended end. That the fault doth not entirely lie upon ministers, is evident from this one consideration ; that the case is much the same in all Christian societies ; though the sentiments and abilities of their ministers, and their methods of address, are very different. It seems therefore to be in a great measure owing to the want of due care in those who attend public worship ; to the neglect of considering the nature and design of the services in which they are engaged ; not paying a diligent attention to them, and neglecting a serious reflection upon them afterwards. I hope you will not only bear with me, therefore, but believe that I am consulting your best interest, while I shall employ this discourse in laying before you such directions and advices as may, by the divine blessing, assist you to make a proper improvement of the word which you hear. And they shall be grounded upon that exhortation of St. Paul to Timothy contained in the text ; “ Consider what I say ; ” which may refer to what he had said to him in person, and in his public preaching, and what he had written to him in this and the former letter. And when he had directed him to consider it, he adds his wish and prayer, that God, the fountain of wisdom and grace, would “ give him understanding in all things,” which were of importance for him to know, remember, and attend to ; and enable him to act suitably to the instructions he had received. The directions I shall give you for improving the word of God, whether read, expounded, or preached to you, are these four :—diligently attend to it ;

carefully remember it; seriously reflect upon it; and let all be accompanied with prayer.

I. *The word of God, in order to its being profitable, must be diligently attended to.*

Christ hath appointed pastors and teachers in his church. They are to "preach the word, to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine; and to reprove and rebuke with all long-suffering." What they say is therefore to be diligently attended to. God demands, and we in his name demand of you, the attention of the ear; that, in the language of Moses, you "set your hearts to all the words that we testify." Every faculty of the soul and power of the body is to be employed for God, and used in his service. "He that hath ears to hear," saith Christ, "let him hear;" hear with all the marks of reverence and seriousness. More particularly,

1. Every thing that would interrupt the attention should be avoided and guarded against. For instance, sleep, and all previous indulgences, and every posture, which would dispose you to it; because this is a notorious affront to God, and shows the utmost contempt of his ministers and his word. Looking about and observing the coming in or going out, the dress or the posture, of others, will certainly draw off the attention from what is said; and is extremely unbecoming, when joining in the greatest solemnity in the world. That caution of our Lord should be always sounding in our ears; "Take heed how ye hear."* Further,

2. The attention of the mind must be fixed to what we hear; and great pains taken to keep the thoughts intent. A person may seem to those about him very attentive, while his thoughts are otherwise employed. We read of some of Ezekiel's hearers, who "sat before God as his people sat," and externally showed much respect to the preacher, and attention to what he said; but "their hearts went after their covetousness;"† their thoughts were in their business, or families, or pleasures. It is good frequently to consider how our thoughts are engaged; if we find them wandering from the point to endeavour to recall them, and to banish those ideas which are unsuitable and unseasonable. A perfect command of our thoughts is not to be expected; but if we keep our hearts with all diligence, often consider and recollect what we are about, and pray for divine help, we should soon attain a habit of greater fixedness and attention. Further,

3. The mind must be closely applied to what is said, with a view and design to understand it. The reflecting powers of the mind should be employed, as well as the attention fixed. Thus Christ said to the multitude, "Hearken unto me, every one of you, and understand."‡ The ground-work of religion is laid in

* Luke viii. 18.

† Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

‡ Mark vii. 14.

the understanding; and it should be the desire and intention of every one, who attends upon preaching, to understand it. A person may be so attentive as to hear every word, and yet not understand it; for want of reflecting on what the preacher saith. Consider then in general the text and subject; attend carefully to the division and branches of a discourse, and to the general drift and design of it. Go back in your thoughts to what hath been before said; that you may observe the connexion, and know upon what the several inferences, reflections, advices, or motives are founded. Such a recollection will make your attention agreeable and profitable. Once more, under this head,

4. Endeavour to attend with suitable dispositions of heart. If a person comes to hear with bad ends, or no good end, or without a proper disposition of soul to receive the word, his attendance will be vain. Now it is obvious with what dispositions we should come. For instance, with a full persuasion that preaching is a divine institution; that what you hear is indeed the word of God, as far as agreeable to scripture; and that each of you, be your rank, character, and attainments what they will, is greatly concerned in it. This is that faith without which the word preached (as the apostle observes) will not profit.* Consequently to come with a view to gratify our curiosity, to have the mind entertained with sentiments or language, or the manner of utterance, is not such a disposition as God approveth, nor will it be serviceable to us. He that would gain benefit by the word, must come with an awful sense of God's omniscience, his infinite superiority and majesty, and his right to prescribe laws to his creatures. He must attend with a persuasion that Christian ministers are the servants of the most high God, who act by his authority; that they are authorized and commissioned by Christ, the head of the church, to publish and explain his laws to the world, and demand attention and obedience to them. Thus the apostle saith of the Thessalonians, "Ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."† There must be an humble desire and full purpose to know and do the will of God. The word is to be received with meekness; with an humble submission of soul to its divine authority; and with good and honest hearts; that is, sincere intentions and resolutions of paying all obedience to it.‡ All hearers should be able to say in sincerity, as Cornelius to Peter, "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God to speak to us."§

II. *The word must be carefully remembered.*

Otherwise we cannot consider it, as St. Paul exhorts Timothy

* Heb. iv. 2.

† 1 Thess. ii. 13.

‡ James i. 21; Luke viii. 15.

§ Acts x. 33.

to do. A care to remember it is peculiarly necessary in hearing the word. What is read may be reviewed ; read over again, and further considered ; but sermons and lectures are once delivered ; and, if something of them is not remembered, all benefit by them will in a great measure be lost. Remembering what we hear is expressed in a very beautiful and instructive phrase by the prophet Isaiah ; it is called hearing for the time to come ; “Who among you will give ear to this? Who will hearken and hear for the time to come?”* that he may have it, as it were, always sounding in his ears. Some indeed have a better memory than others ; and this power of the mind generally decays in advancing years. But where the memory is weak, greater attention and care is necessary. If persons will seriously consider it, there will appear no greater difficulty in remembering the text, the heads and leading thoughts of a sermon, especially where they naturally arise out of the text, and the practical instructions drawn from it, than in remembering any thing else of equal length. Is it not as easy for a young person to remember the text and a few heads of a sermon, as a long story, or a lesson at school ? Is it not as easy for a tradesman to commit to memory the chief particulars of a sermon, as some articles of news which he hath just read or heard ; or the price of a bill of parcels, which he hath just looked over ? Is it not as easy for a servant to remember the principal heads of a discourse as a long message, a piece of scandal out of a neighbour's family, or a verse or two of a trifling song or licentious ballad ? Pains should be taken to commit to memory the general design and most instructive thoughts of a discourse ; especially that part which is particularly suited to a person's own circumstances. In order to assist this remembrance, great care should be taken by ministers, that their divisions be few and natural ; their heads short, plain, and comprehensive ; and to avoid those harangues, without any apparent method or division, which are very unhappily become fashionable. In this view, a short repetition of the heads, and a few thoughts of the greatest moment, is extremely proper, and very agreeable to all meek and devout hearers. Writing down, either at church, at least in your retirement afterwards, the plan and chief thoughts of a discourse, and any thing you are particularly desirous to recollect, would be a great help both to the attention and memory. Another method to impress what is said upon the memory is, to talk it over afterwards with your family or friends, and to inquire of your children and servants what they remember of it. This would be a most profitable employment for the Lord's day evening ; as it would help you and them to recollect what you had heard, as well as engage their attention in hearing ; and it would be the means of impressing it more strongly on your own hearts and upon theirs. Thus

* Isa. xlii. 23.

you would “exhort one another;” and “stir up one another’s minds by way of remembrance.”* This exercise would prevent that profanation of the sabbath, and criminal mispence of sacred time, which ariseth from idle and unprofitable conversation after the public services of the day. You can never complain that you want materials for good discourse, after you have been attending the solemn assembly. We are commanded by the apostle James, “not to be forgetful hearers.” Another apostle admonisheth us, that “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”† And there is an awful intimation of St. Paul, that “we cannot be saved by the gospel, except we keep in memory what is preached unto us.”‡

III. *The word of God must be seriously reflected upon.*

Consideration is the close application of the mind to any subject, chiefly with a view to our own concern in it. For want of this, many who hear diligently, and can remember much of what they hear, are not able to come to the right knowledge of the truth, and never practise those duties which the gospel plainly requireth. It should be our concern, like the virgin Mary, to “keep” these things in memory, and “ponder them in our heart.”§ Serious meditation fixeth truths upon the mind, and is likely to produce important and lasting effects there. I fear most persons think that they have done all their duty, as hearers of the word, when they leave the house of God. But it is then, sirs, that the most important and difficult part of your work commenceth; which is, to review what you have been hearing; to consider your own concern in it; to compare your hearts and lives with the word; to observe what part of the discourse was particularly suitable to your own cases; and in what instance conscience turneth in upon you, and saith, “Thou art the man.” Too many hearers never consider. They are ready enough to apply what hath been said to others, but forget their own concern in it. They can be too curious in observing and remarking a minister’s matter, style, elocution, or gesture; but they observe and retain nothing for their own improvement and edification. But remember, that the word of God is not a fable or a romance. It is not a matter of curiosity and speculation; but it is eternal truth; the rule of life to you, and the rule by which the final judgment of every Christian will be conducted, and his future everlasting state determined. Consequently it is of the highest and last importance; and therefore it ought seriously to be considered. It is a very beautiful and instructive image under which the apostle James represents the want of this consideration; the word is like a glass, which God by his minis-

* 2 Pet. iii. 1.

† Heb. ii. 1.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 2.

§ Luke ii. 19.

ters holds out to you, that you may see your faces, or the true state and character of your souls ; and what spots and deformities there are, which should be rectified. Now with regard to "a man that beholdeth his natural face in a glass" and him that observeth his own case represented by the word, if these "go away and straightway forget what manner of persons they were," their attention and general observation are unlike unprofitable.*

To assist you in that serious reflection upon the word, which is so necessary if you desire to be made better by it, let me advise that you retire, as soon as may be after hearing it, to consider it. I think it next to impossible, at least very unlikely, that any person should profit by the word, who goeth immediately from public worship to talk with an acquaintance about secular business, to read the news, or to pay a formal visit, at which there is likely to be no conversation but about topics too unprofitable at all times, and very unsuitable to the work and solemnity of a sabbath. While the word is fresh in memory we should retire and ponder it over, examine what hath been said by the bible, and bring our own hearts to it as to a touchstone. And those whose circumstances and stations are such, that they have not their own time at command, should endeavour, at least, to redeem some portion of the Lord's day evening for serious reflection upon what they have heard. And I am well persuaded, that one half hour's serious reflection upon a single sermon, will do more to promote wisdom and piety in your hearts, than hearing a thousand without it. Observe in every discourse you hear, and recollect afterwards, what suited your own case, your general character and obligations as Christians, and your particular temper, failings, circumstances, or relations. This will lead you to such reflections as these: The history or character which hath been illustrated to-day, shows me, as in a glass, my own features, and what errors I am to correct. The precept which the minister explained and enforced warns and exhorts me, and I desire to cherish the conviction. The reproof of to-day belongs to me. I am the man who am thus guilty. Whomsoever the preacher meant, the Spirit of God meant me, and in love to my soul sent me this admonition, which I would not forget. This promise belongs to me, as far as I can judge of my own state ; and I may thankfully take the comfort of it. This threatening reacheth my case, and ought to excite my holy fear and caution, lest I come into condemnation. Thus should the word be applied to our own cases, as far as conscience, upon serious inquiry, telleth us that it corresponds to them. Another method to assist your reflection upon the word and improvement of it is, to make it the subject of your first thoughts every morning of the succeeding week. Then call to remembrance what you

* James i. 23.

heard; meditate upon it, and preach it over to yourselves. This will be a good method to keep out evil and unprofitable thoughts, and to encourage those that are good and useful. It is the character of a pious man, that “he delighteth in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.” And David saith, “Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.”* It is the first thing I think of in the morning. Again, it will be very profitable to this purpose, to endeavour to introduce petitions and thanksgivings, correspondent to what you last heard, into your family and secret worship. This will tend to assist your remembrance, and impress the importance of what you have heard strongly upon the mind. It will also furnish you with proper thoughts and expressions for this part of devotion; occasion a variety, which will be agreeable to those who join with you in family worship, and prevent your addresses to God from growing formal. There is such a connexion between the several faculties of the soul, that I cannot think a little exercise of the understanding, and study of some proper words, to be any such hindrance to devout affections as the contenders for stated forms generally suppose; and which supposition is perhaps chiefly owing to their being unacquainted with the nature or benefit of free prayer. The operations of the mind are very quick; and where persons accustom themselves to this method in their secret devotion, they will find less difficulty in using it in their family worship, and thereby they will assist the recollection and promote the edification of those who join with them in it. They who use stated forms in their family worship might, without much difficulty, add to them, every week, two or three petitions correspondent to what they heard the preceding sabbath; and so these desirable ends may be answered to them and their families. In short, every one who would improve by the word of God, and grow “wise to salvation,” should spare no pains to keep it in mind, and to reflect upon it so frequently, and with such seriousness and self-application, as may best answer these important purposes. Once more;

IV. *Let all be accompanied with prayer.*

The text naturally suggesteth this thought. St. Paul directs Timothy to consider, and then prays that “God would give him understanding in all things.” Prayer should precede our attendance on religious worship. Brethren, pray for your ministers daily, especially on the Lord’s day morning, that God would assist them in their preparation for, and discharge of, their public work; that he would remove every thing, either in body or mind, which may prevent their honourable and profitable performance of it, and that they may “speak as they

* Psalm i. 2, cxix. 148.

ought to speak." Pray also for yourselves and one another; that God would assist your attention, strengthen your memories, and excite devout affections in you; that he would help you to attend upon him without prevailing distraction, and "write his laws upon your hearts."* Again, lift up your souls to God in short ejaculations while in his house; when the minister is beginning his discourse, and between the several branches of it, that God would impress divine truths upon your hearts, and make you to feel their importance and their power. Thus, in the liturgy of the church of England, as the minister rehearseth the commandments, the people are directed, in short petitions, to "ask God mercy for their transgression of each for the time past," and to add, "Lord, incline our hearts to keep this law. Write all these laws upon our hearts." Such petitions may, with equal propriety, be secretly added, when any branch of duty is inculcated upon us. And let earnest prayer follow the public service. Enter into your closets and pray to your Father in secret, that he would assist your reflection upon the word; give you grace and strength to avoid the sins pointed out and reprov'd; and to repent of those with which you are chargeable. Pray that he would enable you to practise the duties recommended, and make you "complete in the whole will of God." We have great need to offer such prayers, considering how prone we are to "let slip what we hear,"† and to lose the benefit of divine ordinances. And we have great encouragement to offer them, since God hath been pleased to style himself, "the Lord, which teacheth his people to profit:"‡ and that promise of Christ to his apostles, that the Spirit should "teach them, and bring to their remembrance what he had said to them,"§ extends to us. The Spirit is equally able to teach us; the Redeemer is equally kind to give it; and our necessities are in effect the same. Besides, the general promise of the Spirit to help our infirmities in prayer, may encourage our application for his assistance in the case we are considering; since "neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." To which I would add, that devout addresses to God have, in their own nature, a tendency to make the mind thoughtful and watchful, and diligent to improve religious instructions. Our prayer should be directed to God before, during, and after our attendance upon his word, that it may "accomplish the end unto which it is sent;" and come to us "not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," both of its truth and its efficacy.||

These are the directions I would propose to you, brethren, for your assistance in the right improvement of the word which

* 1 Cor. vii. 35; Heb. viii. 10.

§ John xiv. 26.

† Heb. ii. 1.

‡ Isa. xlviii. 17.

|| 1 Thess. i. 5.

you hear. It must be diligently attended to ; carefully remembered ; seriously reflected upon afterward ; and be accompanied with prayer. As I would not prevent the good effects of any of these directions, by keeping your attention too long engaged, or overburthening your memories at this time, I shall conclude with throwing together a few motives, which I recommend to your further regard and meditation, in your retirements.

A neglect of the consideration required in the text is highly affronting to that God whose word you hear. It is indeed offering him the blind and the lame for a sacrifice, and not serving him with your best, as you are bound to do. It is using your ministers unkindly ; who are taking pains every week to prepare for your instruction and edification. If you are careless and forgetful hearers, it is impossible but they must “labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought.” Consider again, that the preaching the word is the appointed means of faith and salvation. “Faith cometh by hearing.” It is well adapted to promote your knowledge and holiness. But the benefit of it will be lost without attention and consideration. Persons of weak capacities or low attainments, who have no ability, or little time, to read practical and useful books ; apprentices, servants, and the poor, have peculiar reason to take the greatest pains, that they may not lose the benefit of preaching, which may be almost the only advantage they have for spiritual improvement. Where this attention and consideration are neglected, especially in younger life, persons contract a trifling indolent habit of performing religious services, and live in ignorance and stupidity all their days ; insomuch, that I have known persons, who have regularly attended, at least fifty years, on the preaching of the gospel, yet have shown, in the close of life, such ignorance of religion, and have appeared to be so little affected with things of the utmost importance, even when they were just launching into eternity, as hath been an unspeakable astonishment and grief to me. I have heard many, in a time of sickness and confinement, lamenting that they could not go to hear the word of God ; while there appeared in them no concern to practise what they had often heard ; to be penitent, humble, and patient ; to think and speak of death and eternity, and get ready for their approaching change. These circumstances, among other things, have led me to give you these interesting advices. Consider, further, what eminent Christians, how wise and holy, how steady and useful, you might be, if due pains be taken to comply with these directions. Consider, it will give you great concern in the close of life, if you are not quite stupid, that you have trifled away and lost so many valuable opportunities of improving in wisdom and goodness. This loss will have a bad influence on your future state. Though you may be sincere Christians, yet the less you know of God and

of his word and ways, and the less you do for him and his service, the less will be your reward; the less happiness you will be capable of enjoying. Consider, finally, that in every sermon, "life and death, the blessing and the curse, are set before you;" and by that word which you now hear, you must at last be judged. When "the judgment is set, the books will be opened," the books of conscience and of scripture, the book in which God records all the instructions, exhortations, and reproofs of his ministers; and you will be judged according to the advantages you have enjoyed. "Be ye therefore not forgetful hearers of the word, deceiving your own selves; but be ye doers" of the word and of the work it enjoins, that you may be "blessed in your deed."*

And now, my friends, I once more beseech you to take these directions into your serious consideration. Let them be now practised, that this discourse may not be lost. I conclude with repeating my advice to you, and my prayer for you, in the language of the text, "Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things!"

DISCOURSE II.

DIRECTIONS FOR PROFITABLY JOINING IN PUBLIC PRAYER.

1 COR. XIV. 16.

Else when thou shalt bless with the Spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

IT was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, that under the Christian dispensation God's house should be "called a house of prayer for all people;" that "he would bring the gentiles to it, and make them joyful in it."† This intimates that prayer is one part, yea, the chief part of the work and business of God's house, or of Christian churches: and therefore it is very desirable that we should know how to join in it, so that it may be accepted of God, and profitable to ourselves. When we are going to the house of a superior, or even an equal, we are desirous to behave in a becoming manner. Our concern to do so would increase, if we were going to court; especially if it were to present a petition for our lives, or ask any other important favour of our prince. And surely, we should be more solicitous to know "how we are to behave ourselves in the house of God, the church of the living God;" and how to make our requests known to him in a manner that will be pleasing in his sight. My design in this discourse is to give you some directions to

* James i. 22, 25.

† Isa. lvi. 7.

assist you herein. And after what I said, in the former discourse, of the proper manner of hearing the word, I would hope you are come with a disposition diligently to hear, carefully to remember, and seriously to consider and reflect upon, what shall now be said.

St. Paul is, in this chapter, reproving the Corinthians for an ostentatious use of that gift of the Spirit which some of them enjoyed ; namely, a power to speak in languages they had never learned. They were fond of using this gift before those who did not understand the language in which they spoke. To show the unprofitableness and folly of so doing, the apostle argues, in the text, and foregoing verses, that if the speaker prayed, or gave thanks, in a language not understood by the hearers, they could not join in the devotion. How could he that was an unlearned man add his Amen to the prayer or thanksgiving, when he did not understand it ? Hereby plainly declaring, that all religious worship should be in such a language as the most unlearned may understand ; and that it is the duty of every one who attends public worship, whatever his rank and abilities be, to join in it ; to say Amen to it ; which includes all those acts of the mind which are necessary to concurring in it. These I am now to consider ; only desiring you to carry this in your thoughts, that the directions I am to give, for profitably joining in public prayer, are equally applicable to family-prayer, or any other social worship ; and, in some measure, to secret devotion. And the directions are only these two ; that you diligently attend to it, and seriously and heartily concur in it.

I. Public prayer must be diligently attended to.

Ministers are appointed to preside in religious assemblies ; to be, as it were, the mouth of the people in their addresses to God, and lead their devotion. And one would think it should be obvious to the most unlearned, that a minister is not praying for himself only ; nay, that he is not praying for the hearers (which I fear too many suppose) ; but only leading them in acts of devotion, and expressing before God the sentiments and desires which should be rising in all their hearts. It follows from hence, that what the minister utters should be carefully attended to ; that every one's thoughts should be closely applied to the words which he expresseth before God ; and that all thoughts foreign to this important service should be, as much as possible, banished and kept from the mind. Every thing that would draw off the attention and prevent the fixedness of the thoughts, should be diligently avoided. Looking about is highly indecent and sinful at prayer-time. Every object we see will naturally divert the thoughts ; and indeed such a carriage shows that they were never properly directed. Fixing the eye on the minister is very proper in hearing the word, as he is then directly addressing

the assembly; but it is very unbecoming in time of prayer. It carries an intimation that persons are not sufficiently sensible that they ought to be praying as much as he; and by it their thoughts will be easily taken off from what they are about. I must therefore recommend it to all who desire to serve God with true devotion, and have their "hearts engaged to approach unto him," to keep their eyes closed during prayer; or so covered or bent downwards that persons coming into the assembly, or any little motion about them, may not engage their attention, and prevent their devotion.* In this view I must recommend the kneeling posture, where it can be used, as a natural expression of reverence and of earnest desire; a means to prevent the distractions of the heart; and what the word of God, by some precepts and many examples, seems to enjoin.† Every serious mind must condemn and be shocked at the scandalous behaviour of those who, during public prayer, suffer their eyes to run to and fro through the assembly; loll upon their pews; or show a careless air of countenance. The body ought certainly to be placed and kept in a posture of worship, and all the external marks of seriousness, reverence, and devotion manifested; out of regard to the honour of the great God, the solemnity of the work in which we are engaged, and even the credit of our worship. Again, we should attend public prayer with a desire and view to understand it. It is to be supposed, in general, that you do understand it. If there be any forms used in public worship which contain obsolete words, words not in common use, or which are obscure, or sentences which are dark and intricate, it is a great reproach to that society which retains such forms. If the sentiments and language of a minister, who useth free prayer, be above the capacities of the unlearned; if he useth philosophical or metaphysical expressions, or some obscure texts of scripture, it is his fault. But if he speaks in common language, in plain scripture phrases, or such as are generally used among Christians, it is their fault if they do not understand. But the plainest language cannot be understood without regarding it. The propriety and emphasis of common phrases cannot be entered into without attention. In this view it should be the concern and endeavour of all Christians to improve their understandings, and not to be "children in knowledge;" to study the bible, and books of the devotional and practical kind, that they may better understand the language used in God's house. It is also their duty, when they are there, to keep their minds intent to what is said; that, in the language of St. Paul in the verse

* "A true Christian prayeth, closing the eyes of sense, and lifting up those of the soul."—Origen.

† Ps. xcv. 6; Solomon, 2 Chron. vi. 13; Daniel, ch. vi. 10; Ezra, ch. ix. 5; Christ, Luke xxii. 41; Stephen, Peter, Paul, &c., &c., Acts vii. 59, ix. 40, xx. 36, xxi. 5; Eph. iii. 14; Heb. xii. 28.

before the text, they may “pray with the understanding.” And this you will be likely to do if you will put in practice the directions which I have given for profitably hearing the word. But the attending to public prayer and understanding it are not sufficient. A person may do this, and yet never pray at all: therefore I go on to observe,

II. *It must be seriously and heartily concurred in ;*

Or, in the language of the text, you must say Amen to it. Now this includes a hearty assent to the truths declared and acknowledged in public prayer ; a hearty consent to the several desires and requests that are expressed in it ; and that, through the whole, we consider it as our own prayer.

1. Saying Amen, or joining in public prayer, includes our assent to the truths declared and acknowledged ; and this with all suitable affections of mind. The Hebrew word “Amen” signifies *truth* ; and so expresseth an acknowledgment that what he had said was true. Therefore the word was ordered to be used by the Israelites after the blessings and curses had been solemnly pronounced ;* “All the people shall say, Amen ;” that is, it is so, or shall be so ; the godly shall be blessed, the wicked shall be accursed. Thus Christ styleth himself “the Amen, the faithful and true witness,” and the promises of God are said to be “yea and Amen ;” all true, and certainly to be accomplished.† Now this is applicable to the several parts of prayer which are not properly petitions : and you will best understand my meaning by a few illustrations. Suppose a minister to be adoring the perfections of God, acknowledging that he is the greatest and the best of beings ; that he is almighty and all-wise ; that he is perfectly good, long-suffering, merciful, and gracious ; to this you are to say Amen ; that is, your hearts are to acknowledge, with the highest veneration, that it is true ; that these perfections and excellencies do indeed belong to God ; and that he is every way worthy to have them ascribed to him. Doth the minister acknowledge and celebrate the wonderful works of God, his creation and government of the world, and that glory is due to him for these ? You are to join in such acknowledgments ; to confess and adore him as the creator, governor, and father of the universe : and these acknowledgments must be made with suitable affections of heart ; with high and honourable thoughts of his majesty and greatness ; with a pleasing impression of his goodness ; and with all reverence and godly fear. Again, is a minister expressing a thankful sense of God’s favour and mercy to those whose devotion he leads ? Is he praising God for our creation, preservation ; for health, and peace, and comfort ; for our temporal or spiritual blessings ? You are to add Amen to this ; that is, you are heartily to bless

* Deut. xxvii. 15, &c. ; Neh. v. 13.

† Rev. iii. 14 ; 2 Cor. i. 20.

God for the share you have had in such favours. The language of your hearts should be, Lord, I have received these mercies from thee, and am still receiving them; and I thank thee for them, and that so many others partake with me of them. Blessed be God for these benefits! "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!" Your assent to this part of prayer should be made with fervent gratitude, and with high delight and pleasure in recollecting his kindness to you and your fellow-worshippers. And your grateful emotions should arise in proportion to the degree in which God hath favoured you. Thus when David had brought the ark into the tabernacle, and the Levites had celebrated God's praises for the wonderful things he had done for Israel, we are told that "all the people said Amen, and praised the Lord."* So when "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands, bowing their heads, and worshipping the Lord."† Again, is the minister confessing sin before the Lord; acknowledging the corruption of our nature, and the sins with which we are chargeable; lamenting the remaining ignorance, pride, and earthliness of our minds; our deficiencies in duty, and unprofitableness under the means of grace? (which acknowledgment should always be made in the most general terms, that it may suit the case of all as far as may be :) when he is thus confessing sin, you are to add your Amen; that is, to join in such acknowledgments with humility and self-abasement; and secretly to say, Lord, I am the man; thus ignorant, thus guilty am I; thus have I broken thy law, and misimproved thy grace. And when he acknowledgeth any sin with which your consciences tell you that you are peculiarly chargeable, there your assent should be made with peculiar humility, shame, and sorrow; dispositions which ought to attend every confession of sin, or else it is not devotion. Again,

2. Saying Amen, or joining in prayer, includes our hearty consent to the several desires and requests which are expressed before God. Amen signifies, So be it! let it be so! this is what I earnestly desire. In this sense it was added by the Israelites to their prayers, and is annexed by Christ to the Lord's prayer, which chiefly consists of petition. It was added by the apostles Peter, Paul, John, and Jude, to the petitions and good wishes in the close of their epistles. The inhabitants of heaven are described as thus joining in ascriptions of praise to God, and in desires that he may be universally praised.‡ Let me illustrate this particular. Doth the minister pray that God would be merciful to us and forgive us? You are to say Amen; that is, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Doth he pray for the manifestation of God's favour, and the light of his countenance? Your Amen expresseth a sincere desire of this blessing, and that

* 1 Chron. xvi. 36.

† Ezra viii. 6.

‡ Rev. v. 14, xix. 4.

you prefer his favour to every thing else. Doth the minister pray that God would prevent or remove any particular evil, the guilt and power of sin, the habits of vice and sensuality, or enable us to overcome and subdue them? Your secret language should be, Amen, Lord, this is my desire! Subdue my sin; renew and sanctify my heart; make us all really and universally holy. Doth he pray for temporal blessings, a blessing upon our bodies, upon our substance, or our families? Amen; Lord, grant me and my fellow-worshippers this or the other earthly blessing, if it be for the best; if thou knowest it will be good for us. Doth the minister say, Let thy name, O Lord, be praised? Amen, (should you say,) Lord, let it be praised. Doth he express resignation to the divine will, and a desire and resolution to submit to God's disposals? Do you echo back the language; Amen, Lord, I submit to thee, and give up all to thee, with an humble resignation of soul, and a cheerful acquiescence in thy will. Again, doth he make intercession for others, for the whole world, for the church of Christ, for our own country, for our king and all that are in authority, for persons in public stations, or in private afflictions? To all these intercessions you are to join your Amen; to concur in these good wishes and prayers with a generous concern for the advancement of religion and the public happiness, and a tender sympathy with all afflicted cases. This hearty consent of soul to, and concurrence in, the desires expressed, must be kept up through the whole of every prayer, and you should endeavour to feel and express before God such affections as may be suited to the several parts of it. I add once more, (though it be not a distinct thought, for I cannot be too plain in a matter of so much importance,)

3. Through the whole of every public and social prayer, we are to consider it as our own prayer. Public prayer is the address of a whole assembly to God at once. Every single person in the congregation doth, or should, offer up the same adorations, thanksgivings, and petitions, which the minister doth. He, as I hinted above, but must again remind you of it, is not praying for himself; nor is he praying for the people. Therefore when I hear it said, The minister gave us a good prayer; or he prayed or read prayers very well, I am ready to fear that those who say so know little of the nature of public prayer, or do not sufficiently consider their own concern in it. And probably they would be affronted if they were asked, How did you pray at that time? though it is a question which they should seriously ask themselves. When I hear persons inquiring, Whom did the minister pray for? I am ready to entertain the same suspicion; and should have a better opinion of their understandings and their piety, if they were to make the inquiry thus; Whom did we pray for? Or, whom did the congregation pray for? Every one who attends public worship is to consider himself as praying for him-

self, and praying both with and for those who join with him. You are to say the same things to God for yourself, as the minister saith. If you neglect your Amen, and do not concur in the prayer, the minister prays and others may pray; but you do not pray at all. If you drop your attention to, or neglect your concurrence in, any one petition, so far you do not pray. You may be spectators or hearers, but you are not worshippers; you are not praying except you "lift up your hearts and souls unto God in the heavens."* Let me just observe, that it was a custom among the Jews and first Christians, and is still practised in many Christian assemblies, for the people to say Amen at the conclusion of every prayer. And I could wish it were universally done, as we have so many examples of it in the word of God, and it was the custom of the primitive churches after the apostles' days. But this is not sufficient. Amen, as it expresseth hearty concurrence, should be added secretly to every expression of adoration, thanksgiving, and petition. The word Amen may be secretly repeated, or any other correspondent expressions of sincere concurrence and earnest desire. There are some persons who, through the infirmities of their bodies or minds, or the want of taking pains in early life to gain a habit of attention and fixedness of thought, may find it impossible or very difficult to keep their minds attentive to a whole prayer. I would recommend it to such, as perhaps the best method to attain this end, secretly to repeat the prayer after the minister, and to make it their own. If they will do this, as I have known some pious Christians whose constant practice it hath been, it will tend to keep their hearts engaged, and promote their edification. If any find that they can command their thoughts without this method, I would not urge it. Every one must judge for himself. Only you must remember that you do not pray, except you offer up the same petitions as the minister, and join in his acts of devotion. To assist you in this, often recollect your thoughts. Ask your hearts one or more of these questions; Am I praying now? Am I joining in these requests or thanksgivings? Doth the God, whom I profess to be addressing, know that I am heartily engaged in this work? Am I now following hard after God and stirring up myself to take hold on him?† A devout and excellent writer on this subject‡ recommends to Christians "to enlarge upon, and add to the expressions of him who prays in public;" as when he desires some great and important blessing, you may enforce it by this addition, Oh, grant it to me for thy mercy, or thy Son's sake. When he is confessing sin in general, you may secretly glance at a particular sin of your own, and say, Lord, pardon that sin; help me against this my infir-

* Psalm lxxxvi. 4; Lam. iii. 41.

† Psalm lxiii. 8; Isa. lxiv. 7.

‡ Bennet's Christian Oratory, vol. ii. p. 107, where some of these hints of advice are more largely illustrated and recommended.

mity ! When the minister saith, Lord, we devote ourselves to thee ; we offer and present our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to thee ;* you may add, Lord, may I be thine, wholly and for ever thine. These little parentheses or additions will not hinder your attention, but are an excellent means both of expressing and increasing devout affections.

As the Lord's prayer is so frequently used in Christian churches, either as a distinct prayer or joined to other prayers, there is great danger lest the use of it should become formal and unprofitable ; it ought therefore to be uttered with due reverence and proper pauses between the several clauses of it ; and it should be concurred in with great attention and seriousness ; especially as it is the Lord's prayer, and as the petitions are so short, yet so very important and comprehensive.

It is very proper also, in this connexion, to exhort you to great attention, while the blessing is pronounced at the conclusion of public worship. The minister utters a solemn prayer to God, as well as expresseth his devout wish for the best blessings to be communicated to you which can possibly be desired. He ought therefore to pronounce it, after a due pause, with great deliberation and seriousness. God commanded the priests under the law to pronounce such a blessing upon the people, and promised to bless them.† The apostolical benedictions are of the same import, and have been used in all Christian churches. There is therefore just reason to expect the blessing of God, and that he will fulfil the pious wish and prayer. Let it not therefore be considered as a mere form, or kind of declaration, that the service is concluded. It is part of the service of God's house, and a most important, I had almost said, an essential, part of it. Consequently hastening away or getting into a posture for removal, without attending to it, joining in it, and asking the blessing for yourselves, is highly indecent and irreverent. It shows great ignorance, or absence of mind and a disregard of the divine blessing. While it is pronounced, be very attentive and serious ; lift up your own hearts to God, that you may, under the influence of it, improve the services on which you have been attending, and enjoy the happy effects of it every day.

These are the directions I would give you, relating to public and social prayer : it must be diligently attended to ; and seriously and heartily concurred in. You are to assent to the truths declared and acknowledged by the minister ; to concur in the petitions he presents ; and consider every public and so-

* Communion Service.

† Numb. vi. 22, &c. The Hebrew canons have this rule here ; " Do not say, What availeth the blessing of this simple priest ? For the receiving of the blessing dependeth not on the priests, but on the holy blessed God. The priests do the commandment which is commanded them, and the holy blessed God, in his mercy, bleaseth Israel according to his pleasure."—Ainsworth in loc.

cial prayer as your own prayer. And now let me conclude with a few reflections.

REFLECTIONS.

1. *This condemns the practice of the church of Rome*, in appointing that their public prayers should be in Latin, a language unknown to almost every one that attends upon them. It is impossible that the unlearned should join in such prayers, and say Amen to them with any devout concurrence. Justly doth the preface to the Common Prayer say of them, "They hear with their ears only, and their heart, spirit, and mind, are not edified thereby." The apostle's reasoning in the text utterly condemns such a practice: and the imposition of it is of itself sufficient to vindicate our separation from such a corrupt church. Let us be thankful for our deliverance from popish darkness, error, and superstition. Let us bless God that we have the scriptures and public prayers in our mother tongue; and consider ourselves as obliged, by the kindness of Providence, to be wise and devout. The papists cannot join in public prayer. If you do not, it will be much the same thing; only your guilt will be greater, and more inexcusable. Is there not too much reason to add,

2. *How few are there in our assemblies that properly join in prayer?* As protestants, we have prayers in our native language. Our public liturgy is in general well adapted to the circumstances of Christian worshippers: and protestant dissenters think they have some peculiar advantage for fixed and lively devotion by the use of free prayer. Yet how much is it to be lamented, that so little of this devotion appears in any of our assemblies! In how careless and irreverent a manner do some ministers utter, and many private Christians attend, public prayer! What indecent whispering, looking about, staring at the minister, or the people! What careless airs, what lazy postures are seen in many! How easily are their eyes, and, it is to be feared, their hearts too, drawn aside by every one who cometh in, goeth out, or stirs or moves about them! How few are there, who show the proper marks of seriousness and reverence; and may we not fear, that some of those few do not heartily join? Are they not like the statues, or images on monuments, in our ancient churches; in a praying posture indeed, with eyes and hands lifted up to heaven, but with hearts hard as stone, cold as marble? Nay, hath not God reason to complain of every one of us, that we sometimes "draw near to him with our mouths, and honour him with our lips, while our hearts are far from him?"* Let us be humbled before him on this account. Wherein we are conscious that our behaviour, or frame of mind, in God's house, in family, or other social worship, hath not been such as it ought to have

* Matt. xv. 8.

been, let us humbly receive the admonition, and labour immediately to correct the error. And let me entreat you all, brethren, to take these directions into your serious consideration, and endeavour for the future to act upon them. It is indeed a work of difficulty; but it may be done; it should be done; it must be done, if you desire that your prayers should be heard, and God should treat you as acceptable worshippers. Whenever you are come to God's house, remember that you are in his immediate presence; that you are come to converse with him, and address to him. Let this thought be often recollected, while you are engaged in prayer. To go to God's house of prayer, and not seriously to address the God of the house; to pretend to pray, and not to pray; to appear to men to pray, and yet never think of what is saying, and take no care to join in it; what trifling, irrational, hypocritical conduct is this! You are self-condemned, and are offering the most shameful indignity to the majesty of heaven, before whom ten thousand times ten thousand wise and holy beings bow down with the profoundest reverence, and address him in the most exalted strains of devotion and praise. By neglecting this serious attention, and hearty concurrence, you lose all the pleasure and benefit of prayer. To devout Christians this is the noblest exercise of the mind, and affords the sublimest delight. But it must be tedious and burdensome, a mere task and slavery, to those who have not their hearts in it. For want of this concurrence, you will gain a habit of trifling with God and conscience and sacred things; and having only "a form of godliness without the power," "will have your portion with the hypocrites."* For you can never have a capacity or a relish for the work of heaven, which consists very much in devotion, if you are strangers to this devout temper here below. Finally,

3. *How much do we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit*, that our devotion may be pleasing to God, and comfortable and edifying to ourselves! Every humble Christian is sensible of this; and those who are most desirous to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," are most sensible of it. The work we engage in is great and important: our thoughts are too easily diverted; and it is difficult, with all our care, to keep them so intent and so serious as they should be. Let us rejoice therefore, that the assistances of the Spirit are promised to "help our infirmities," to "make intercession for us" or "in us,"† by exciting fervent desires in our hearts, and keeping alive the sacred flame of devotion. Let us daily pray for this Spirit, as "a Spirit of grace and supplications."‡ Pray daily, especially on a Lord's day morning, for your ministers; that God would be with their spirits; that they may be enabled to lead your devotion with seriousness and fervency; and express such desires as may be suited to your circumstances. And pray for yourselves and one another, that

* Matt. xxiv. 51.

† Rom. viii. 26.

‡ Zech. xii. 10.

God would assist you to keep your thoughts fixed; that he would excite proper affections in your breasts, and maintain them there, through the whole of his service. When the minister is beginning any prayer, lift up your souls to God in the language of Christ's disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray!" Lord, help me in this duty! Those are most important and excellent forms in our public liturgy, if they are duly considered and seriously pronounced, "The Lord be with you;" Answer, "And with thy spirit." "Lift up your hearts;" Answer, "We lift them up unto the Lord." Remember that divine help will be experienced and felt in proportion to the pains you take to prepare your hearts, to engage your attention, and feel those affections which ought to attend religious addresses. Upon the whole, consider, the great end of prayer is our own edification. "Thou givest thanks well," saith the apostle, in the verse after the text, "but being in an unknown language, the other, the unlearned, is not edified." Brethren, it should be your concern to be edified; to grow better by every act of devotion, more wise, and holy, and stedfast. And this I am verily persuaded, through the blessing of God, will be the case, if you will attend to and practise these plain directions. I conclude with that weighty declaration of Christ, "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

DISCOURSE III.

DIRECTIONS FOR PROFITABLY SINGING THE PRAISES OF GOD.

PSALM C. 4.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

"WHILE we sing the praises of our God in his church," saith the devout Dr. Watts, "we are employed in that part of worship which of all others is the nearest akin to heaven; and it is pity, that this, of all others, should be performed the worst upon earth. To see the dull indifference, the negligent and thoughtless air, that sits upon the face of a whole assembly, while the psalm is on their lips, might tempt even a charitable observer to suspect the fervency of inward religion; and it is much to be feared, the minds of most of the worshippers are absent or unconcerned." I hope things are altered for the better, since that complaint was made: which may in a great measure be attributed to the harmonious and sacred composures of this pious poet, and of others, which have been published since his; and

* John iv. 24.

to the use of them in so many churches and families. But though in this respect we are highly favoured above our fathers, there is too much reason yet to complain, that our psalmody is not so well managed as it might be, nor our attention and ardour in singing God's praises so great as they should be. There is therefore room for my giving you some directions, for the more devout and profitable performance of this part of religious worship; as I have already directed you to the proper manner of hearing the word, and joining in public prayer. To introduce these directions, I have chosen that exhortation of the psalmist in the text; "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name." On which I shall only observe, that the several expressions of "thanksgiving, praise, thankfulness, and blessing," may be here used to intimate to us, how greatly our minds should be impressed with the importance and solemnity of this part of worship; and with what ardour our praises should be offered. And since this exhortation was addressed to the Israelites, who lived under a darker dispensation, and had many carnal and burdensome ordinances, we are under peculiar obligations to labour after greater fervour in our praises; as we enjoy the glorious gospel of Christ; have more delightful ideas of God, more promises of spiritual assistance and blessing, and a better hope. The directions, which I would give for more comfortably and profitably joining God's praises, are these: we should sing with the attention of the mind, the melody of the voice, and the devotion of the heart. And let me observe, that these directions are equally applicable to singing his praises in our families; and in some measure to the secret performance of this duty.

I. God's praises must be sung with the attention of the mind.

This, as I have observed in the former discourses, is necessary in every act of worship; because without this our worship cannot be acceptable to God, nor useful to ourselves. The words which are to be sung, whether given out by another or read by yourselves, should be carefully attended to, that you may enter into the meaning of them. In order to this, the words must be considered, as well as heard or read; and considered with a view and desire to understand them. This is the more necessary, from the very nature of poetry. Though the psalms sung in our churches are generally plain and intelligible, yet their language being poetical, and therefore more elevated and more concise than prose, it demands peculiar attention. There may be some words used in these compositions which are not often used in common language; but the connexion will generally explain their meaning, if it be attended to and considered. A person can never be rationally or piously affected with what he sings, except he understands it. Without this, there is no more devotion

in him, than there is in an organ or other musical instrument which utters the like sounds. Or if there be any thing like devotion excited by mere sounds, it is probably enthusiasm, or something purely animal; a sort of pleasing mechanical sensation, which perhaps some brutes may as strongly feel, by sounds suited to the state of their frame. Unless a person understands what he sings, he may as well sing Latin psalms, as they do in popish countries; but this can never make psalmody a "reasonable service." It is our duty as rational creatures, as Christians, as protestants, to apply our minds closely to the words of praise, that we may understand them. Thus the psalmist saith, "God is the king of all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding;"* which Dr. Watts thus beautifully paraphraseth:

"Rehearse his praise with awe profound,
Let knowledge lead the song;
Nor mock him with a solemn sound,
Upon a thoughtless tongue."

In like manner, when St. Paul is reproving the Corinthians for abusing the gift of tongues, and leading the praises of others in a language unknown, he tells what ought to be their care; "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."† I will endeavour to know the meaning of what I sing, and that others may understand it too; else he intimates, that it would be quite unprofitable.‡ Nor is it sufficient to understand the words which are sung; it is necessary to consider the importance, excellency, and suitableness of the sentiments contained in them. And as in singing, each word and syllable is dwelt upon, and pronounced slower than in reading or conversation, this gives room for the mind to enter fully into their meaning, and perceive and feel their propriety and instructiveness. Let us then attend to the spiritual and important nature of what we sing; and let our thoughts be employed in close meditation upon it. To this I must add, that every thing which would hinder, or interrupt the attention, must be carefully avoided. Singing is as much an act of worship as prayer; and therefore the eye should be fixed, and not roving and wandering about. The countenance should be grave and composed. All the visible marks of seriousness and reverence should be manifested; and every thing unsuitable to the solemnity of worship diligently guarded against. I mention this so particularly, because many

* Psalm xlvii. 7.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

‡ From this reasoning and these texts, it appears that hymns which express the author's particular sentiments upon disputable and mysterious doctrines (which hymns and doctrines the bulk of a congregation, perhaps the most intelligent of them, cannot understand) ought never to be sung. It is no wonder that clerks in general do not see the absurdity of this practice; but it is truly wonderful that ministers do not see and prevent it. I once heard a hymn sung in a very large assembly, containing several Latin and Greek words, which I am persuaded not one in it understood, except perhaps the preacher.

Christians, who behave with great decency and reverence in time of prayer, do not behave so while singing; which I impute to their not duly considering this as an act of worship.* But besides external reverence in singing God's praises, the mind should be abstracted, as much as possible, from all sensible objects; the thoughts should be often recollected to keep them intent,—checked when they are beginning to wander; and constant pains should be taken to preserve and secure the attention. We are to sing God's praises,

II. *With the melody of the voice.*

Poetry enlivens praise; and music heightens the powers of poetry, and gives it more force to engage and affect the mind. It puts spirit into every word; and their united influences elevate, compose, and melt the soul. From hence it will follow, that the better the poetry is, provided it be intelligible, and the greater harmony there is in uttering it, the greater effect it will have upon the mind, and make the impression of what we sing more deep and lasting. As God hath formed us with voices capable of uttering harmonious sounds, he expects that they be employed in his service. In this view the "sweet psalmist of Israel," whose soul was at once musical and devout, calls his tongue his glory; "I will sing and give praise; awake, my glory;" "That my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent."† It is the peculiar glory of man above the brutes and even the birds, that he can utter harmonious sounds with a rational meaning and pious affections. It is fit that our tongue, which is the glory of our frame, should be employed in praising God; and it is never more our glory than when it is so employed. Every one who considers the nature of God, and his worship, must be sensible that he ought to be served in the most perfect manner we are capable of. And if it be allowed, as I think every considerate person must allow, that the melody of the voice adds to the credit and beauty of our worship, and tends to make it more delightful and edifying, this ought to be carefully studied. I am not for turning the church of God into a theatre or an opera-house; but you will agree with me, that every part of God's worship ought to be performed in the best manner. Every one knows that our senses have great influence on our higher powers. The innocent pleasures of the ear, from harmonious sounds, are a help to excite devout affections in the

* I own that there seems to me a great impropriety in sitting, while engaged in this service. It appears plain from some passages in the Old Testament, that the Israelites stood up when they sang praise to God, or heard psalms of gratitude and devotion uttered by the Levites, in which they were to express their concurrence, by adding Amen or Hallelujah or both (1 Chron. xxiii. 30; 2 Chron. xx. 19; Neh. ix. 5). It was also the custom of the first Christian churches; and it is retained in many churches to this day, which I mention to their honour.

† Psalm xxx. 12, lvii. 8.

soul. And indeed unless singing be grateful to the ear, the ordinance will be exposed to contempt, nor is it so likely to answer the ends of devotion. "God is not the author of confusion," but requires every thing in his worship to be done "decently and in order." Therefore care should be taken that there be regularity, decency, and harmony in this solemn and delightful service. In order to this all should join in it, and perform it in the best manner they are able. All should join in it. I mention this, because many persons, whose hearts, I hope, are truly devout, never sing at all ; or only in a low indistinct murmur, which even those who are nearest to them can scarcely hear. But this is their fault, if they have not bodily infirmities, which prevent their voices from being heard. Every one ought to extend his voice in singing to as great a degree as he is able, provided it be not stretched beyond the bounds of harmony. God demands the service of the voice. We are required to "make a joyful noise unto God with psalms ;" to "make the voice of his praise to be heard ;" to "play skilfully with a loud noise," or (as the old version reads it), to "sing praises lustily to him with a good courage."* We are commanded in the New Testament to "speak to ourselves," or (as the word may signify, and is elsewhere rendered) "to one another," and to "teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."† This implies that we are to sing so as to be heard, and not to speak or sing only to ourselves. I hope there are none of the women who think it unbecoming the modesty of their sex to have their voices heard in singing the praises of the Lord. I hope their omission of this duty, or their lazy performance of it, which is too notorious in most Christian churches, are not owing to the want of inclination to glorify God, and heartily to bless his name ; though one would be ready to suspect it of those who can sing or speak loud enough at other times. But whatever it ariseth from, I must be allowed to rebuke their omission or indolence. And I do so particularly, because I am of the mind of a serious writer upon this subject, who observeth, that "it is one, if not the principal reason, why God, in his adorable wisdom, hath distinguished, by its pleasant softness, the voice of the woman from that of the man, to temper the sound, and render it more sweet and melodious, when they are joined together in singing God's praises."‡ Further, as all are to join in

* Psalm xcvi. 2, lxxvi. 8, xxxiii. 3.

† Eph. v. 19 ; Col. iii. 16.

‡ To this some devout Christians object, that in the churches to which they belong they have a set of men called "singers," who have introduced such a large variety of tunes and are frequently introducing new ones, and some of them so full of repetitions and flourishes, &c., that it is impossible for them to learn them : so that they cannot join as they ought, and could wish to do, in this part of worship. In these churches many seem willing that psalmody should be confined to the professed singers ; never attempting to join their own voices, lest they should lose the pleasure of hearing these. I must leave the pastors of such churches to answer, if they can, this objection of the devout ;

singing, so all are to do it in the best manner. It should be the desire of all young people especially, to learn to sing, that they may contribute to the harmony of God's house. Under the Jewish dispensation, we read of some who "taught to sing praise."* But if any think themselves too wise or too old to learn, or that it is not very important, I entreat that they would, for their own sake, join in singing, and endeavour, for the sake of others, to do it in such a manner as not to interrupt the harmony; particularly, that they do not run into an unseemly noisiness; that they do not begin before the rest; nor drawl out notes to a tedious length, when the rest have done. Every one, who can hear at all, must be sensible that this breeds confusion, and hinders the melody of worship. A very little attention to the manner in which the more skilful sing, and the length of their notes, would prevent any great irregularities. And a person of a common understanding, by attending to the manner in which a tune is set or begun, may observe, whether its motion is quick or slow, and so regulate his singing as at least not to disgrace the harmony. Nor is the melody of the voice of so little importance as some may imagine. In acts of religion towards God, a small circumstance may express much duty, or much disobedience; and not to perform every religious service in the best manner we are able, is "offering to God the lame, the torn, and the sick," and acting as if we thought any manner of performing it good enough for him. Let me then entreat you all, to employ your best attention and skill, and exert your voices in this blessed employment; that, as the apostle expresseth it, "ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."† Which leads me to add, God's praises must be sung,

III. *With the devotion of the heart.*

The greatest skill in singing, the exactest melody of sounds, are nothing, except the heart be engaged, and accompany the words of the voice. Without this, we sing to ourselves, and not to the Lord, and put him off with mere air. It is necessary we sing with good intentions, and proper affections of heart.

We are to sing with good intentions; and not merely to please the ear, or the fancy, with word and tunes. It is not

and can only express my own astonishment and concern, that they have ever permitted so much reason to be given for it. What pity is it that some of the teachers of others are not better acquainted with the nature, design, and effects of singing and melody in general, especially in divine worship. I would beg leave to recommend to their attention what the ingenious and accurate Dr. Gregory hath observed upon this subject; "Simplicity in melody is absolutely necessary in all music intended to reach the heart. Not a single note or grace should be admitted, but what hath a tendency to the proposed end," &c. Gregory's Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man, &c., vol. ii. p. 68, &c. 6th edition.

* 2 Chron. xxiii. 13.

† Rom. xv. 6.

sufficient to understand what is sung, to attend to it, and join our voices with those of our fellow-worshippers; but our intentions should be upright and good. And they should be these; to glorify God, and to edify ourselves and others. Our intention should be to glorify God, as in the text just cited; that is, not to make him more glorious, for neither the praises of men nor angels can do that; but to do him apparent and public honour; to acknowledge his glory; to proclaim our high veneration and affection for him, and celebrate and recommend him as an object worthy the esteem and praises of the whole world. Thus we are required by the psalmist to "sing forth the honour of his name, and make his praise glorious;"* and by the apostle, to "make melody in our hearts to the Lord." Agreeably to this we are told that "he who offereth praise glorifieth God," and that to "praise the name of God with a song, and magnify him with thanksgiving, pleaseth the Lord better than the most costly sacrifice."† It should be our desire, also, to edify ourselves and one another. Thus St. Paul commands us to "speak to ourselves and one another," and to "teach and admonish one another in" David's "psalms, and hymns" of praise to God, "and spiritual songs," songs on religious subjects.‡ We are to sing with a desire and endeavour to impress religious sentiments and truths on our own hearts, and to have our souls enlivened and quickened. It should also be our intention and desire to spread a spirit of devotion and a lively sense of religion among all who join with us; and so provoke one another to a holy emulation in praising and serving him "who inhabiteth," or is surrounded and delighted with, "the praises of Israel."§ And as our intentions in this service should be good, so,

Proper affections should be excited and maintained in our hearts. The natural passions should be working suitably and answerably to the subjects which employ our thoughts and our lips. For instance; we should sing with an humble reverence and awe of God's greatness and majesty; sensible that it is a solemn thing to speak unto the Lord, and to take his name into our lips, who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises," and whose "glorious name is exalted above all blessing and praise."¶ We should sing with humble adoration of his great condescension; which is remarkably manifested in this, that any thing we can do should be called service and any thing we can say should be called praise. Further, we should sing with ardent gratitude to God for all his bounty and goodness to us. Our hearts should be deeply affected with his mercies. We should acknowledge them with grateful emotion, which will be pleasing to him, and promote in us a disposition and endeavour to make him proper and acceptable returns in the course of our lives.

* Psalm lxvi. 2.

† Ps. l. 23, lxix. 30.

‡ Eph. v. 19; Col. iii. 16.

§ Psalm xxii. 3.

¶ Exod. xv. 5; Neh. ix. 11.

Thus should we “exalt the Lord, and make a joyful noise to the God of our salvation.” Again, it should be done with fervent desire after him, and love to him, as the most excellent, glorious, and beneficent Being; and with holy cheerfulness and joy in him, which this ordinance both expresseth and increaseth. Hence we are so frequently called upon to “rejoice and be glad in the Lord;” and to “rejoice and sing praise” are often joined in scripture. Singing is a natural expression of joy; and we have abundant reason to “rejoice in the Lord always,” and “in every thing to give thanks,” and especially when we meet in his sanctuary; there we should “be joyful in the Lord, be thankful unto him, and bless his name.”* These are the directions I would offer for your comfortable and profitable discharge of this delightful part of public worship. God’s praises must be sung with the attention of the mind, with the melody of the voice, and with the devotion of the heart.

Your practising these directions might be urged by many considerations. I shall only remind you of the very great importance of it. To sing with the attention is necessary, as it is an act of worship; and as it will tend to impress divine truths and principles on the mind. To sing with the melody of the voice is necessary, out of regard to the greatness and glory of that Being whose praise we profess to celebrate. It is necessary to render our worship honourable, decent, and pleasing. Every one, though he hath no musical ear, is pleased with harmony, and can feel the disagreeable gratings of discord and confusion. These give great pain to every one who hath attained any skill in this divine art; and indeed they have a tendency to interrupt the attention, to hinder the pleasure of the work, and even damp the devotion of the heart. Harmony in singing God’s praises tends to enliven and exalt the affections. By heartily joining in this service, and performing it in a becoming manner, we contribute to elevate the devotion, and to animate and com-

* If any should ask, with what dispositions of mind they should sing penitential and mournful psalms and hymns, containing confessions of sin, humiliation and sorrow before God, prayers for pardon, and complaints under afflictions, I can give no other answer than this, that such psalms and hymns ought not to be sung at all. There seems to be a glaring impropriety and absurdity in this practice, which, one would think, should immediately strike every considerate mind. St. James evidently prescribes a contrary practice; “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry,” or cheerful? “let him sing psalms,” ch. v. 13. “Musical singing,” saith Cyprian, “is most agreeable to praising and adoring God; but our petitions ought to be presented with fervent prayers, tears, and groans.” I see no scripture evidence, that the penitential and mournful psalms of David were ever sung in the Jewish worship. It appears from the histories of the Old Testament, that the only psalms used in the service of the Jewish tabernacle and temple, were the language of praise and thanksgiving; or acknowledgments of the divine favours, which were adapted to produce gratitude. There seems therefore to be a peculiar impropriety in singing in Christian assemblies such poetical composes as express deep sorrow, either for our sins, or the sufferings of Christ, “despairing or melancholy thoughts, or personal resentments against enemies, or any which are not well suited to the spirit of the gospel, which is a dispensation of love, hope, and joy.” Watts’s Psalms, 8vo, pref. p. xix.

fort the heart of each other. It is necessary, in order to make melody in our hearts, that the several graces correspondent to this service be in exercise. For what is melody of voice, but a proper mixture of notes or sounds, each in its place? What is melody of heart, but the regular exercise of every Christian grace, suitable to the subjects which employ our tongues? Let this then be our principal concern, to "sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord."* Without this, the finest melody of our voices will be but as "a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal;" an empty unmeaning, unprofitable sound. Words without meaning are often mistaken by men for civility and good breeding; but they will not pass for pure and undefiled religion with him who searcheth the heart. Without true devotion there, we only "flatter him with our lips." But when we can say with David, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise;" when we "bless him with our souls, and when all that is within us praiseth his holy name,"† in such worshippers he delighteth. Nay, even though, through the infirmities of nature or of age, they can only "chatter, like a crane or a swallow," as was the case with pious Hezekiah in his sickness,‡ yet with such singing, such sacrifices of praise, God is well pleased. "It is," as a devout writer observeth, "a real pleasure to the blessed God, to see such an union and conjunction of hearts in singing his praises; all animated by one and the same spirit; breathing forth the same desires; paying the same divine worship; all fixed in the contemplation and adoration of his excellencies and perfections." Let every one of us then look to our hearts, that this melody be not wanting there.

APPLICATION.

That you may the better comply with these directions, let me exhort and entreat you,

1. *To guard your tempers and the frame of your spirits at other times.* Particularly watch against a peevish, sour, fretful temper, which will unfit you for the work of praise. It hath been long observed, that persons who love music are generally good-tempered. And it is highly probable that the frequent and devout singing of God's praises would much contribute to soften and sweeten bad natural tempers. Guard against a censorious, uncharitable spirit, which indisposeth the heart for singing; and especially singing in concert with others. Let there be a constant harmony in your own souls, that you may be the better disposed for the work of social praise. Endeavour to gain and keep such possession of your spirits, that no external circumstances may sour, ruffle, or even discompose them. Be upon your guard against the prevalence of those uncomfortable passions, fear, resentment, and sorrow; in which too many

* Col. iii. 16.

† Ps. lvii. 7. ciii. 1.

‡ Isa. xxxviii. 14.

serious Christians indulge themselves. They give way to a melancholy spirit, and take little pains to stir up the more agreeable passions of love, hope, and joy; though these are more suitable to our gospel privileges, and more particularly suitable to their own state. In consequence of such dispositions as I am cautioning you against, the mind will be almost always out of tune for this blessed work; and such heavy hearts will have no relish, even for songs of praise. God requires and expects that we serve him with cheerfulness and gladness of heart every day; especially that, as the text directs, we “enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise,” and approach to him as to “our exceeding joy.”*

2. Let me further exhort and entreat you, that you *pray for the help of God's Spirit*. “Without his aid,” one of the fathers saith, “it is impossible to sing in good tune, or measure, or harmony;” at least it is impossible to sing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. When you enter on this duty, pray that God would “open your lips, that your mouths may show forth his praise;”† that he would grant you the influences of the Spirit, to quicken and enlarge your hearts in the service; to excite every suitable grace, and keep it in lively exercise; and thus qualify and enable you to enjoy more of the pleasures of devotion, and prepare you for the work of heaven. And, indeed, what stronger argument can I conclude with and urge upon you, to promote your observance of these directions, than this; that singing God's praises is the work of heaven, the only ordinance which will be in use there? In that state much of our present work will cease, and many duties of religion will not be necessary. Prayer, properly so called, will cease; repentance and self-denial, patience, faith, and hope, and hearing the word, as the means of promoting these virtues, will all cease. But praise is the work of heaven; and our improving knowledge, holiness, and happiness will enlarge the subjects of our songs, and raise and exalt our capacities of praise. Singing God's praises will last for ever, and be the business of a blessed eternity. Let us then engage in this work now, with all our powers of body and mind. If you, brethren, will act upon these directions, and thus sing the praises of God, our assemblies will then be a lively emblem of the general assembly and church of the first-born above; and our present pleasure and joy would be a foretaste of that, with which we hope at length to join the worship and services of that innumerable host of angels and glorified spirits, who “sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb for ever.”‡

I conclude with the words of pious Mr. Baxter; “Methinks when we are singing God's praises in great assemblies, with

* Psalm xliii. 4.

† Psalm li. 15.

‡ Rev. xv. 3.

joyful and fervent souls, I have the liveliest foretaste of heaven upon earth ; nor is there any exercise in which I had rather end my life. And should I not then willingly go to the heavenly choir, where God is praised with perfect love, and joy, and harmony ? Lord, tune my soul to thy praises now, that sweet experience may make me long to be where I shall do it better."

CHRISTIAN ZEAL:

OR

THREE DISCOURSES

ON THE

IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING THE THINGS OF CHRIST MORE THAN OUR OWN ;
FROM PHILIPPIANS II. 21.

———Fungar vice cotis, acutum
Reddere quæ ferrum valet, exors ipsa secandi. HOR.

P R E F A C E.

MANY excellent treatises have been published of late in defence of toleration and liberty; and many attempts made to increase that candour and moderation, for which the present age hath been celebrated. It is hoped that these writings have produced, and will produce, some very good effects. But is there not reason to lament that, amidst this zeal for liberty, and this progress of moderation and charity, there is a great want of zeal for the support and advancement of real practical religion, and for the good of souls? Many have shown a zeal for or against subscription to articles of faith of human contrivance; and some, on each side the question, much bitterness. But where shall we find a true, well-regulated zeal for the indisputable truths of the gospel, and that sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, which all are sensible, and acknowledge, that it strongly inculcates? Where shall we perceive a zeal to use, and lead others to use, the appointed means of religion; family-prayer, and instruction, secret devotion, the religious observation of the Lord's day, and the pious education of youth? Where shall we find an habitual concern and readiness to "exhort one another daily," and "provoke one another to love and good works?" Shall we look for these, where they may most naturally be expected, among the ministers of the gospel? But are not too many of them the persons who, considering their office, qualifications, and obligations, are most culpably remiss therein? Have they not contracted much of the spirit of this world? Do not their air, dress, conversation, and manners savour too much of the levity and dissipation of the age? Are none of the sacred character to be found at the theatre, the card-table, and other fashionable diversions; "shining in every public place—but the pulpit;" as if they thought it unbecoming to appear in common life with any thing of the divine about them? Do none of these make the Lord's day a common visiting day, or permit it so to be perverted and profaned by their families? Do not some content themselves with short, general, cold harangues from the pulpit, in the strain of a pagan philosopher, which, however learned, elegant, and polite, the generality of their hearers can neither relish nor understand? Are not catechizing, the instruction of youth, and personal visits to the families under their care with a religious view, shamefully neglected; while their zeal is employed about learned trifles, or mere amusements, or in censuring those who make it the aim of their ministry and the business of their lives to win souls? What is the consequence of this remissness? What, indeed, is naturally to be expected? The ministry is sinking into contempt; the house of God much forsaken; and even well-disposed persons decline attending upon their public instructors; not so much because their sentiments differ from those of their fathers, as because they discern few or no marks of that seriousness and earnestness, for which most of them were eminent. Many in the higher ranks among us pursue their pleasures on God's holy day; and, when they attend public worship, too much consider it in the light of an amusement, and relish no preachers but such as will entertain them. They forget that the house of God is not a place of amusement, but instruction; that a preacher's business is not to entertain, but edify; that there are other places enough and too many, for public amusement, without seeking it in the sanctuary. Thus their religion becomes quite easy, genteel, and fashionable. "It assumes the habit and complexion of the world, and is so blended with the follies of the age, that it makes a motley appearance, and becomes more ridiculous than pure unmixed folly itself." They seem to think a careless, trifling, dissipated life perfectly consistent with true piety; and thus fatally deceive their own souls. It is to be feared that the sanction of the respectable names and examples of some Christian ministers, leads them further into the vanities and snares of the age, than even those ministers would wish them to go. Many in the lower ranks either throw off the appearance of religion or forsake their

regular instructors to follow every ignorant, confident exhorter, who hath nothing to recommend him but the appearance of that zeal and earnestness which they very naturally expect to find in a preacher of righteousness. Thus they are led into the wilds of enthusiasm; contract an eager zeal for notions, phrases, and forms; their spirits grow conceited, turbulent, and censorious; and very few of them ever become sober, humble, discreet, judicious, regular Christians. That this is the state of things among us is, I fear, too plain to be denied, and every active Christian will lament it; while he cannot but with pleasure and thankfulness observe, that there are yet many Christian ministers whose spirits and address are serious, their air and conversation grave and manly, becoming persons of a sacred character; who labour in the word and doctrine, teaching publicly and from house to house. Thus they magnify their office and adorn Christianity; and their esteem and success are answerable to such a pious and honourable conduct. I should be sorry if any should take occasion, from these hints, to think me an enemy to any Christian ministers or their usefulness. Can it be wrong to represent and blame those irregularities and neglects which are so visible and notorious; and which the laity, even those of them who are most irregular and disorderly themselves, loudly condemn? Had I been their enemy, I should have been silent; or said that all is well, and applauded the present generation for their rational sentiments, their refined judgment and taste, and their polite manners. But alas! what are all these, while seriousness, gravity, charity to the souls of men, and zeal to do good, are almost lost from among us; and while those few, in whom these dispositions are found, are often censured, misrepresented, or neglected? The learned and venerable Bishop Bull long ago observed, (and oh that the present race of ministers would attend to his remark!) that "the preacher who is not clothed with righteousness and zeal, though otherwise richly adorned with all the ornaments of human and divine literature, and these gilded over with the rays of a seraphic prudence and sagacity, is yet but a naked, beggarly, despicable creature; of no authority, no use or service in the church of God." How desirable and seasonable is it, that every one, who hath the interest of religion, the credit of the gospel and its ministers, and the welfare of our country, at heart, should attempt to remove these irregularities, and bring professing Christians, especially ministers, to a wiser and better way of thinking and acting! Fain would I say something to rouse the languid spirits of the indolent and lukewarm; and to preserve, invigorate, and increase that zeal, which is yet to be found in some, both in public and private stations. The feeble attempts of the weak may rouse the slumbering virtue of the strong. He who is not capable of working himself, may be useful by quickening and encouraging others. I would in this view say with Horace, in the language of my motto (which for the sake of the English reader, may be thus translated),

"Not that I dare to active zeal pretend,
But only boast to be religion's friend;
To whet men on to act, and like the hone,
Give others edge, though I myself have none."

With this intent I put into my readers' hands these plain discourses, and hope for their serious attention to the motives and arguments urged in them. These ought to come with peculiar weight upon the hearts of Christian ministers, as the text and context more particularly refer to them. There seems a peculiar propriety in begging the attention of dissenting ministers to them at this time; when their most reasonable desires and hopes have been again disappointed. I earnestly wish they may concur as unanimously and heartily in their zeal for real religion, and the salvation of the souls under their care, as they have done in their zeal for religious liberty, the rights of conscience, and the authority and honour of its only Lawgiver and Judge. This would secure and increase their interest and credit, and certainly engage the assistance, favour, protection, and rewards of "the Bishop of souls."

Kidderminster, Sept. 15, 1773.

J. O.

CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

DISCOURSE I.

PHILIPPIANS II. 21.

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

ONE of the greatest difficulties and discouragements attending the office of Christian ministers is this, that they can seldom insist on the most necessary duties, or reprove great and prevailing irregularities, as they are required by their Master to do, without giving offence. If their admonitions are not so plain and forcible as to be perceived and felt by those who need them, they think they have no concern in them, and the admonitions are given in vain. But if the guilty persons perceive and feel their force, instead of receiving them with humility and meekness, and setting themselves to reform what is amiss, they are often angry at the friendly monitor; and, as St. Paul expresseth it, he “becomes their enemy by telling them the truth.” What then in this case must be done? Must a minister suffer his hearers to go on in a way that is not good; not only grieving his heart but dishonouring Christianity, injuring and endangering their own souls, and setting a bad example before others? Must he be false to Christ and his cause, defeat the end of his office, and become a “partaker of other men’s sins,” rather than displease them or run the hazard of displeasing them? If he acts thus, how will he give up his account to his Master and Judge at last? Indeed he will now directly fall under the censure of the text, and must be numbered among those of whom the apostle complains, that “they seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” I would be most careful and solicitous to give no occasion for this censure to be applied to me at any time, least of all when I am discouraging upon the subject.

It is a mournful complaint which the holy, active apostle makes in the text; a complaint which, I fear, there is always reason to make, especially at present. If your hearts, my brethren, are truly serious, you will, I apprehend, see cause to remember and lament your faults this day, as I do my own. I would endeavour, therefore, by divine strength, to guard myself

and you against so mischievous an error for the future. St. Paul is here informing his Christian friends at Philippi, that he intends to "send Timothy shortly to them, that he might know their state and be comforted," v: 19. He adds, that the reason why he chose to send Timothy was, that "he had no man like-minded, who would naturally care for their state," v. 20; none who had such a pure, genuine, fervent zeal for the interest of Christ and the welfare of his disciples. "For," saith he in the text, "all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." The word "all," is not to be understood literally, but as it is often used in scripture and common language, for the greatest part, the generality. This is plain, because just after the text he mentions Epaphroditus as a person of eminent piety and zeal. He found no one so zealous, active, and disinterested as Timothy was. Most others, at least in the place where he then was, sought their own things, not the things which are Christ's; that is, they sought their own things more than those of Christ. By "their own things" are meant, their own ease, safety, and prosperity; their temporal interest and reputation; the wealth and honour of their families. By "the things of Christ" are meant, the credit and success of his religion, the glory of God, and the salvation and happiness of mankind. These Timothy sought, and preferred to his own things. His genuine care for the Philippians showed itself by his zealous endeavours to promote their spiritual prosperity. These are the things of Christ; things which lay near our Saviour's heart, about which he was most solicitous; which he sought in all his discourses, actions, and sufferings. These are the things which he hath still most at heart; in which his own and his Father's honour are nearly concerned; on which the welfare of men depends; which, therefore, he requires and expects us to seek. The leading view and aim of others were their secular interest. Timothy, and the pious zealous few, sought the things of Christ more than their own. They were willing to deny themselves; to give up their own ease, honour, and worldly profit; yea, to sacrifice life itself, for the good of the church and the salvation of souls.

And now let me entreat your very serious and candid regard to what I shall address to you upon this subject, and to the friendly admonition which I shall give you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And may his sacred Spirit, which descended upon the apostles in a fiery form, inflame your love to Christ and quicken your zeal for him, by what is now to be suggested! I shall,

I. Show how justly the observation in the text is applicable to the present state of religion among us, by pointing out the principal instances in which persons seek their own things rather than the things of Christ.

II. I shall propose and urge some arguments and motives in order to promote in you and myself a greater zeal for the things of Christ; and then,

III. Add some reflections and exhortations naturally arising from this subject.

I. *This discourse will be employed in showing how justly the observation in the text is applicable to the present state of religion among us.*

And, as men are prone to deceive themselves with a notion that they are not deficient in zeal, I would point out the principal instances in which they seek their own things rather than the things of Christ. Thus I hope at once to convince you of the justice of applying the apostle's remark to ourselves, and lead you to see that many more are concerned in the admonition than you may at first think, or than is generally imagined; and thus also I hope to show you how shameful, criminal, and pernicious, that selfish and lukewarm disposition is, which is described in the text. By illustrating the principal particulars in which it appears, without a scrupulous attention to minute distinctions, I would take in, as far as I can, every case of this kind, and come home to the consciences of all to whom I am addressing. I entreat you to examine your own conduct and hearts as I proceed, that you may see how far any of these characters belong to you. God will judge impartially another day. May he enable you so to judge yourselves now, that you may not be condemned of the Lord! Men seek their own things rather than the things of Christ,

1. When they are more concerned about the prosperity of their families than of the church of Christ. When they seek their own profit more than that of the church. It is every man's duty to be diligent in that calling or occupation in which Providence hath fixed him; to attend to his own proper business in life, and make a competent provision for his family. But this is not to be the great end of life; not the ultimate nor principal object of your desire and pursuit. It is carrying matters to a very criminal extreme, to be ambitious to leave your children very rich, and enable them to exceed all their neighbours in elegance and grandeur. They seek their own things who imagine that getting money and enriching their families is the main chance. All their thoughts centre in this. Their heads, and hearts, and tongues, are full of it. "They rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness;" are incessantly contriving and toiling, and allow themselves little or no time for reading and devotion, and scarce any to eat or sleep, or enjoy the good of their labours. Their thoughts and cares are all devoted to themselves and families. The success of their trade and schemes is the principal object of their joy; and

nothing gives them so much delight, as to see the glory of their houses increased. But observe how these zealous, indefatigable men behave with regard to the things of Christ. Where appears their public spirit, their benevolent concern for the good of others? When do they appear to enter heartily into the concerns of the church? They sometimes hear of "the prosperity of Jerusalem," but do not "rejoice" in it. They often hear of "the afflictions of Joseph," but are not "grieved" for them! It is nothing to them, whether religion flourishes or withers; whether the churches revive or decline. They never seriously consider and inquire, whether public worship be attended or neglected; whether piety, justice, and charity, prevail or lessen; whether the wants of the poor are supplied or overlooked; whether ministers are encouraged or discouraged. These are affairs to which they are quite indifferent. If all goeth on well and smooth at home, they have not one serious thought about the progress of religion and the glory of Christ. Where is the Christian society, in which some, in which many, of this character are not to be found? One may justly apply to them the description which the prophet Haggai giveth of the temper of the Jews in his time; every man "runs to his own house," is for building, adorning, and replenishing that; while "the house of the Lord," in many respects, "lieth waste."* They seek their own more than the things of Jesus Christ,

2. Who are unwilling to give a just proportion of their money, time, and labour, to promote the interest of Christ. The former head relates to their habitual temper; this, to particular instances in which it appears. Can any thing be plainer in general, than that multitudes, who profess themselves the disciples of Christ, seek their own profit, ease, and reputation, more than the honour of their Master; and the support of his religion? Their maxim is, to save all that they get; or to lay it out in adorning themselves, their children, and houses; in making elegant and luxurious entertainments, or in enjoying fashionable amusements and pleasures. But they grudge any expenses which may be necessary for the church to which they belong, or any other which may desire and need their assistance. How often do they complain that they are burdened with expenses; that collections occur too often; and it is fitter that applications should be made to those who are richer than they. They start objections to every public-spirited design and proposal. They make a variety of excuses for not concurring with it, which those to whom they make them know to be quite groundless: and if they cannot, for shame, refuse some contribution, it is given grudgingly, and with all the marks of pain and reluctance. When business is to be transacted, and schemes to be formed or executed for the good of the church, the support

* Hag. i. 9.

of religion, or the relief of the poor, they plead that they cannot spare time to give their attendance; their business is too large and important to admit their concurrence; and, as there are enough without them, they leave the affair to their management. Now that they urge this plea for declining their assistance in such cases with an ill grace, appears from hence, that they spend much more time in unprofitable company and amusement, than the public business requires; and that more frequently than they are called to such benevolent services. Their general conduct shows that the true reason of their backwardness to such services is, that there is nothing to be got by them: and they are averse to take any trouble upon themselves, by which no immediate worldly advantage is to be acquired. So entirely are they attached to an earthly interest, that they will not practise a little self-denial to serve Christ and his church. This I apprehend is the principal case to which St. Paul refers in the text. He could very ill spare Timothy, while his own sphere of service was so much contracted by his imprisonment at Rome. But no one else had zeal enough to submit to the fatigue and expense of a journey to Philippi, and encounter the troubles he might be likely to meet with there. Therefore he was obliged to part with Timothy. Again, they answer the character given in the text,

3. Who are hindered from seeking the things of Christ by difficulties and discouragements which do not hinder them from seeking their own. It is well known that no worldly business and interest will succeed and prosper without diligence, resolution, and patience; without surmounting difficulties, and proceeding against many discouragements. In this case men expect them, prepare for them, and are not disheartened by them. But much smaller difficulties and fewer discouragements will deter them from seeking the interest of Christ. This circumstance shows which way their zeal operates, and in what cases they consult their own ease. So great is the opposition to the interest of Christ from Satan and wicked men, that little can be done to promote it without courage and resolution, and a determination, like good soldiers of Jesus Christ, to endure hardness and reproach for its sake. But most professing Christians now are too delicate to endure these. The very fear of them is a sufficient discouragement to their timid spirits. They say, "There is a lion in the way; I shall be slain in the streets." Sometimes they are afraid of being "envied by their neighbours for a right work." They are more frequently afraid of being censured by them, if they show any zeal for religion. They are ashamed to appear in its cause, though they show no such reluctance where their own interest is concerned. Thus, for instance, they often hear oaths and curses; they see the sabbath profaned; and by these crimes the laws of God and our country

are notoriously violated: yet they have not piety, zeal, and courage enough to call for justice upon such pests of society, and bring upon them the penalties of the law. They fear they shall be censured as righteous over-much, or as busy and impertinent; though they know that none will censure them but the criminals themselves, or others who have as little regard to religion, decency, and our country as they. "The fear of man bringeth a snare," and damps all their zeal. How often do we hear such pleas as these: I must keep up my credit in the town; I should be glad to act, but I shall affront this or the other great man; I shall disoblige such a friend, or such a customer. They approve of a good design; and, if it should meet with no opposition, they will fall in with it; but if it is opposed, especially by the rich and honourable, they will drop it. They presume that they shall be censured, as too busy and forward, as vain and assuming, if they exert themselves in the cause of religion; or shall be laughed at as singular and precise. They plead, I have formerly been ill-treated or blamed for acting; and should I meddle now I shall get an ill name; therefore I must be excused and leave the work to others. If such surmises were a sufficient reason for declining attempts to serve Christ and do good, his service would be quite neglected and no good would be done. But it is observable that the persons who lay the most stress on such pleas and excuses, seldom fear man, or mind what the world saith of them, while pursuing their own interest. They boldly push on their favourite schemes, through dishonour as well as honour, through bad report as well as good report. Some are seeking their own health and ease; and where piety and charity are concerned, "will not adventure to set the sole of their foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness."* Hence they are kept from improving their minds and countenancing religion by a regular attendance upon public worship: yet they will venture, with all their infirmities, to visits, meetings of trade or pleasure; and will be at some expense to secure themselves from danger then, which they scruple when their presence is required at the house of God. It was said of the Messiah, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."† But how little of this zeal is found among Christians! Indeed "the present state of the world is such, that to attempt to serve it any way one must have the constancy of a martyr, and a resolution to suffer for its sake."‡ The zealous Christian hath this constancy and resolution. He is as bold as a lion; feels the spirit of the ancient martyrs and confessors, who "loved not their lives to the death for the testimony of Jesus," and neither sneers, nor reproach, nor bonds, nor death move him. Further, they prefer their own things to those of Christ,

4. Who resent injuries and affronts to themselves, more than

* Deut. xxviii. 56.

† John ii. 17.

‡ Mr. Pope.

those which are offered to Christ and religion. Thus they seek their own honour more than Christ's. This appears in these instances. They are angry at any contempt put upon them or their relations; any reflections upon their family, their conduct, their furniture, dress, or even the provision of their tables. Yet they shew no resentment of the contempt or neglect of divine institutions, of the order and provision of God's sacred house. They hear scoffers and gainsayers reproaching religion, and speaking evil of the good ways of the Lord, without reproving them; without saying a word in defence of holy things, or even testifying a dislike of scornful language by an angry countenance. Instead of being grieved for the sins of others, and speaking of them with deep abhorrence, some will treat them as a light matter, and laugh with the "fools" who "make a mock at sin." They will dismiss, correct, or sharply chide a servant who should injure them or use ill language to them or theirs; but can hear their servants and workmen profaning the name of God, affronting the majesty of heaven, by swearing, cursing, or taking his name in vain, without any resentment or with only a slight reproof. If their own reputation is unjustly aspersed, or even with some appearance of reason, how doth their wrath arise! What pains are taken to vindicate themselves, and trace the slander to its origin! And if they can fix it on any one, what deep implacable resentment against him! But they are very little moved by the indignities and affronts offered to the Lord Jesus; and can hear his name and religion blasphemed without feeling any indignation or showing any concern. Their own character, honour, and reputation are to them as the apple of their eye: the least dust irritates and pains it. But the reproaches of those who reproach Christ affect them not. Some who make a profession of religion associate with, and speak to, the profanest wretches, with as much respect, ease, and indifference, as to the most righteous and exemplary; and esteem it a breach of politeness to make any difference in their behaviour to a saint and an abandoned profligate. But in the eyes of a zealous Christian, "a vile person is contemned, but he honours them who fear the Lord;"* "he beholdeth the transgressors and is grieved." He more quickly resents and is longer affected with, the dishonours thrown upon Christ and his religion, than any thrown upon himself. Among those who prefer their own things to the things of Christ, must be ranged the persons,

5. Who neglect the souls of those who are related to them or connected with them, while they take great care of their bodily and temporal interest. A sincere zeal for Christ and love to man will show themselves by our endeavours to promote the knowledge, holiness, and salvation of our relations and acquaint-

* Psalm xv. 4.

ance. They therefore are very defective in Christian zeal and love, who care not for the souls of others : not even for those which are by Providence committed to their charge. There are so many melancholy instances of this, as to show that the apostle's observation in the text is remarkably true now. Most parents are much concerned for the health of their children ; and that they may have some trade or calling, and may acquire such accomplishments as will enable them to make their way, and be acceptable in the world. But there is no religion in their families ; no family prayer ; no pious instructions ; no prudent government ; no restraints from that which injures their souls, if it doth not injure their health or fortune. Thus they seek their own credit and satisfaction. But did they seek the things of Christ, they would be most solicitous about the souls and the eternal interest of their children. Some who read the scriptures, and daily pray with their families, are not concerned personally to exhort and admonish their children and servants : they take no care how they spend their sabbath. If these do their duty to them, they are very little concerned whether they discharge their duty to God or not. So that seeking their own things is the predominant principle in their hearts. They are civil and kind to their relations and neighbours ; but suffer sin upon them, and are not jealous over them with a godly jealousy. They can contentedly see them ignorant, careless, and vicious ; and will not be at the expense of putting bibles and useful books into their hands, nor even give them a word of exhortation. They often spend whole afternoons and evenings with their friends and neighbours, without beginning or encouraging any serious discourse ; without one word of God, and Christ, and religion. Thus they appear to seek their own convenience and pleasure, but not the salvation of others. They are perhaps charitable and generous, ready to pity and relieve the distressed : but if they take no pains to instruct, edify, and save their souls, it is to be feared that their charity is only "seeking their own," their own reputation and applause, or merely gratifying their compassionate sensations ; and self-love may be the source and end of all their liberality. Whereas the chief aim of the zealous Christian is to do good to the souls of others ; and he can say with the apostle, "Even as I please all men in all things ; not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."* Further, may not they be charged with this selfish spirit,

6. Who will do nothing or very little to assist and encourage those who are seeking the things of Christ ? St. Paul often complains of the backwardness of his fellow-Christians to countenance and encourage him ; and sometimes of their shamefully deserting him and the glorious cause in which he was engaged. Demas forsook him through love of the present world, and

* 1 Cor. x. 33.

would not go where the apostle would have had him. When he was to appear before the Roman emperor and make his apology, "no man stood with him, but all men forsook him."* Some of his brethren in the ministry would not accompany him in his travels, or visit particular places, through an inordinate love of their own profit, reputation, or ease. And many instances of such a disposition are to be found among us. There are few who have what St. Paul calls "a natural," genuine, hearty "care" for the advancement of religion.† They will help their relations, friends, and neighbours in their worldly affairs and interests, but decline giving them any countenance in a public-spirited design. It is the character of too many religious societies, that they will do very little to encourage their ministers. They will deny them a comfortable and honourable subsistence; or, if with equity and cheerfulness they support them, they will take no pains to second and encourage their labours. The whole work of maintaining religion is devolved upon pastors, while few of their flocks are careful about it. Many attend public worship with regularity and seriousness; they conscientiously pay their ministers their dues, and show them various marks of esteem and respect; but they will not work together with them, by the religious care of their own families; by encouraging those who attend public worship, especially if they are in low circumstances; or by exhorting and quickening one another. How few, especially of rank and fortune, will imitate the example of Hezekiah, who "spake comfortably," or "to the heart of the Levites," that taught the good knowledge of the Lord;‡ and study proper methods to encourage them in their work! How few of either sex resemble those pious women of whom St. Paul speaks with so much honour and affection, as "labouring much in the Lord,"§ "labouring with him in the gospel,"|| according to their sphere and ability. If they see their brethren and friends shamefully remiss in their attendance upon public institutions, or defective in their obedience to the gospel, they think it is nothing to them; nor will they give them the most distant hint that they act wrong. So cold is their zeal and love! Yet at the same time they will probably rise up in defence of their minister's character, if it be attacked, and show any civility and kindness to their remiss brethren in their secular concerns. Nay, it is to be feared that they do not help their ministers by their prayers for them; or else they would show the sincerity of those prayers by active services for the good of the church to which they are related, and thus strengthen their ministers' hands. Men seek their own things when they are cowardly; will not appear on the Lord's side, and join with those who zealously espouse it. Perhaps they will blame

* 2 Tim. iv. 10, 16.

† Phil. ii. 20.

‡ 2 Chron. xxx. 22.

§ 1 Cor. xvi. 12.

|| Phil. iv. 3; Rom. xvi. 12.

their imprudences, and say, They are good men and mean well ; but too strict and narrow, and carry matters too far ; and yet never attentively consider whether this be really the case ; or, if it be, never attempt to regulate their zeal better. Sometimes they will highly commend the zeal of others, but show none themselves. Again, they seem to approach to this character also,

7. Who have some zeal for the interest of Christ, but not proportioned to their abilities and opportunities. Some of the persons to whom the apostle refers in the text were good men, but they wanted zeal. They had a sincere concern for the honour of Christ, but would not pursue it through difficulties and dangers. Thus there are many now of whom it cannot be said that they entirely neglect the things of Christ, yet they are lukewarm in their regard to them, and will not exert themselves. Some persons of fortune, for instance, contribute much less to works of piety and charity, than in reason they should do ; and are prone to blame others, without reason, for being imprudently generous, because it shames themselves. Some who have large families take care of the souls of their children, but neglect the souls of their servants and workmen, over whom they have great influence. They might safely, and to good purpose, reprove their irregularities, but will not. A hint of caution from them would be well taken ; but they will not give it. They sometimes plead that this would only be casting pearls before swine ; though they never made the experiment. Some persons, again, of good sense, reading, and knowledge of mankind, will not employ their abilities and talents for Christ ; but rather show the superiority of their understanding, and the authority of their station, by opposing all the measures of others ; disputing for disputing's sake ; and pushing forward their own schemes to the ruin of peace, and the neglect of good manners and decency. Thus they gratify their own pride and spleen, which is, in one of the worst senses of the word, "seeking their own things ;" but they show little zeal to promote piety, friendship, and unity. Nay there are many Christians who are, in the main, zealous for Christ, yet their zeal for their own things too often preponderates. They are afraid of doing too much, even for Jesus ; and they say of many things good in themselves, They are more than is needful. There are many intervals of life in which they forget him. They do not consider this part of his service as their daily business ; what should be uppermost in their thoughts, and one end of all their actions. They do not study and contrive for the things of Christ so carefully and zealously as they should. I am to add, once more, another class of persons, chargeable with seeking their own things more than those of Christ, are they,

8. Who are more zealous for those particular modes of faith

and forms of worship, which distinguish themselves and their own party, than for the acknowledged essentials of Christian truth and duty. I choose to mention this character distinctly, because this kind of zeal is often mistaken for zeal in the cause of Christ, and recommended as such; though it is most foreign from it, and opposite to it. This St. Paul hath expressly determined, when he tells the Corinthians, "While one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions," about particular persons whom ye set up as heads of parties, "are ye not carnal and walk as men;" as your unregenerate heathen neighbours? * We see instances of this spirit frequently, and almost in every place. We meet with many who have, as St. Paul observes concerning the Jews, "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." † It is neither well directed nor well founded. Some persons are warm and eager in defending and propagating their own sentiments on controversial points; they censure and condemn all who do not hold these, and call them by some hard and opprobrious names: nor do they always spare those of the same sentiments with themselves, if they are not equally zealous for them. They esteem all those to be pious and godly, who are in their own way of thinking; though some of them trample upon common probity and fidelity, and discover much conceit, bitterness, and ill temper; while they entertain an unfavourable opinion of all others, be their characters ever so unblameable, and their lives useful. Others confine their respect, affection, and encouragement to those who use, and are zealous for, their own distinguishing modes and acts of worship (though perhaps only will-worship, at least not particularly and expressly instituted), however unlovely in their disposition and carriage; while they look shy upon, and will have no fellowship with those, who, from conscience towards God, think and act otherwise, however amiable their temper may be; and are ready to impute their best actions to mean or hypocritical views. These zealots will compass sea and land, submit to any labour or expense, to make proselytes to a party and support a particular sect and interest; but they take little pains to cultivate and promote real holiness, and to cherish, express, and advance that love which is so essential to the character of a Christian, that without it, all his knowledge, faith, and zeal are nothing. Let a preacher be ever so weak, injudicious, and uncharitable, he will have their countenance and applause, if he dwell upon their particular tenets and phrases, and deliver them with noise and confidence. But were Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, to preach with celestial wisdom and eloquence, without using their favourite language, he would meet with a cool reception, if he was not censured as unsound, and a stranger to the gospel. I wish all

* 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4.

† Rom. x. 2.

of the sacred order themselves were free from this narrow spirit, this unhallowed zeal. But I fear some of them, like St. Paul's opposers, "preach Christ, not sincerely, but in pretence" of piety and zeal; "even of strife and contention," to support a party, and bring an odium upon all who are not connected with it.* They take pains to increase these unchristian dispositions in all under their influence; that, by prejudicing them against other teachers, they may bring them into their own schemes and measures, that themselves alone may be followed and admired. Nor let it be thought strange that is the case now; for it was so in the days of Isaiah. There were some then who "hated, and cast out their brethren, saying, Let the Lord be glorified!"† that is, they pretended great zeal for God and his church. It was the case in the apostles' days. There is an exact description given of such persons by St. Paul; "They zealously affect you, but not well; yea they would exclude us, that ye may affect them;"‡ that is, they boast an extraordinary zeal for the gospel, and concern for your welfare; but they are only seeking to draw you to their sentiments and party; yea, they would quite shut us out from any share in your regards, that you may be warmly attached to them; and, having engrossed you to themselves, they serve their own ambitious and worldly views at your expense. One would think some could take no comfort in believing and preaching what they think to be true, and doing what they judged to be right, unless they can degrade and censure those who will not submit to their decision, or do not come up to their standard of orthodoxy;§ and unless they can have the pleasure to know that their brethren are exposed to penalties and discouragements, for professing and preaching different principles. Now all this is not true Christian zeal, but self-love in another form. Whatever such persons profess, their aim seems to be at "their own things," their own reputation, authority, influence over others, or secular interest, rather than the things of Christ. They appear to love and defend themselves and their own sect, rather than Christ and his cause. Were their zeal pure and true, it would exert itself to promote that temper and conduct which the gospel requires of all its professors, as essential to the Christian character, and absolutely necessary to salvation.|| But while it is otherwise directed, and

* Phil. i. 15. † Isa. lxvi. 5. ‡ Gal. iv. 17, marg., and Doddridge in loc. |

§ "Mistake me not; I do not slight orthodoxy, nor jeer at the name, but only disclose the pretences of devilish zeal in pious, or seemingly pious men: the slanders of some of these, and the bitter opprobrious speeches of others, have more effectually done the devil's service under the name of orthodoxy, and zeal for truth, than the malignant scornors of godliness."—Baxter's Works, vol. iv. p. 372, b.

|| "Our own particular darling tenets, by which we stand distinguished from the bulk of Christians, we look upon as our private enclosures, our private walks, in which we have a property exclusive of others; and which we take care to cultivate, beautify, and fence in against all invaders. The received notions, however important, we are more indifferent to, as the common field, or public walks, which lie open to every body."—Seed's Funeral Sermon for Dr. Waterland.

terminates on those things which are peculiar to any party, it is not pure Christian zeal; for that is always accompanied with humility, candour, and benevolence. Where that prevails, the disciple of the meek and charitable Saviour is not lost in the bigotry of the self-righteous Pharisee, nor the bitterness of the disputer of this world. Accordingly St. James saith, "If you have bitter envying," or zeal, as the word is, "and strife in your hearts, glory not;" do not call this grace and religion, and the spirit of the gospel, and zeal for God; "and lie not against the truth," in making pretensions to them.*

Thus, from a sincere concern for the advancement of religion and the good of your souls, I have pointed out to you the most observable instances, in which men seek their own things more than the things of Jesus Christ. I exhort you to search and try yourselves, as in the sight of God, whether, and how far, you are chargeable with these irregularities and defects. I conclude this discourse with those words of Christ to the lukewarm Laodiceans, which I hope you will apply to yourselves, and candidly suppose that I address you from a like principle, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent."†

DISCOURSE II.

PHILIPPIANS II. 21.

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

IN the present state of human nature, there are imperfections in the graces of the best men. Every one hath his weak side; and there is some sin which "easily besets" him. But there is no virtue in which good men are more generally defective, than in an holy active zeal for the honour of Christ, and the support and advancement of true religion in the world about them. Some of the first professors, yea, and preachers of the gospel, were shamefully remiss and defective herein. In these days of liberty and peace, we are in more danger of having our love wax cold, than in times of trouble and persecution. We all need repeated exhortation on this subject; and fain would I stir up your hearts, brethren, and my own, to be more zealous for the welfare of the church of Christ, and the holiness and salvation of our fellow-creatures. To this end, I endeavoured, in a former discourse from the text, to show you what multitudes need such an admonition. I observed that the apostle's expression means, that the generality sought their own things, their own safety, ease, wealth, and reputation, more than the things

* James iii. 24.

† Rev. iii. 19.

of Christ ; the things which he had at heart ; which he sought, and requires and expects us to seek ; that is, the glory of God, the interest of religion, and the salvation of others. I proposed to show how justly the observation in the text is applicable to the present state of religion amongst us, and pointed out the principal instances in which men seek their own things more than the things of Christ ; and they were these : seeking the prosperity of their families more than the welfare of the church ; being averse to give their time, money, and labour to promote the interest of their great Master ; suffering themselves to be hindered from seeking it by difficulties which do not prevent their seeking their own earthly interest ; resenting injuries and affronts offered to themselves, more than those which are offered to Christ and religion. This selfish spirit appears in neglecting the souls of those who are related to them, or connected with them, while they show a proper concern for their temporal and bodily interests ; in a backwardness to assist and encourage those who are zealously seeking the things of Christ. It likewise too much prevails in many who have some zeal for his honour and interest, but not proportioned to their abilities and opportunities ; and it shows itself by a greater zeal for those modes of faith and worship which distinguish a party, than for the acknowledged essentials of Christian truth and duty. There is just reason to fear that some or other of these particulars suit many of us too well. And though I am persuaded there are many exceptions to the general application of the text, yet it must be allowed to be a friendly part to caution you against the errors into which you may fall in this untoward generation, as well as to admonish you of those into which you may have fallen. I now proceed,

II. *To lay before you, and urge upon you, some motives and arguments, in order to excite and maintain in you a greater zeal for the things of Jesus Christ.*

And here I entreat you carefully to consider the following particulars : how great the dignity, excellency, and authority of Christ are ; how much more important his things are than your own ; how many oppose or neglect them ; how inconsistent it is with your profession and engagements to neglect them ; that you will most effectually seek your own things, by seeking his ; and, as the most forcible argument to every grateful mind, consider how diligently and earnestly Christ sought, and is still seeking, your true, your best interest. Arise, O Lord, and plead thy own cause ; and let thy word be mighty to quicken our languid spirits, that we may glorify thy name !

1. Let us consider, how great the dignity, excellency, and authority of Christ are. Let us consider his dignity and rank. He is, by a generation which none can declare, the Son of God ;

his only begotten Son; and therefore superior to all creatures both in earth and heaven. He is, by an union which can neither be explained nor conceived, one with the Father; "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." We have no words to denote greater ideas than these, nor can the mind of man raise itself to nobler conceptions. His interest therefore must be worthy our care. The affairs of a king, who rules over a great people, must be very important. We condemn and resent treason and disloyalty to our gracious sovereign; nor can we think those of his servants and subjects act a loyal and dutiful part, who embarrass his government, and perplex his measures, when they ought to join heartily to assist him. To neglect the things of Christ is treason against his dignity, and shows great defect in our reverence for him, and attachment to him. The excellency of his character also renders lukewarmness highly blameable. He is "holy, harmless, undefiled," as well as possesseth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. His measures are all wise, right, and good. He doeth all things well. The happiness of his subjects is the end of his administration. It is no personal gain to him, if we are ever so zealous. He requires us to be active, for the sake of ourselves and our fellow-servants. Let us consider what he sought, what he preferred, what he had at heart, what he laboured to promote above every thing else; and that was, the glory of God in the salvation of perishing souls. This will show which way our zeal should operate, and will tend to excite and support it. Let us reflect further, how great his authority is; especially over us. He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. God hath highly exalted him; given him a name above every name; dominion over every creature; and all power in heaven and in earth. Though his rank and authority are so high and great, yet he requires nothing of his subjects but what is reasonable, fitting, and beneficial. He commands us to seek his things; to love one another; to serve one another in love; to instruct, reprove, admonish, and comfort one another: not to seek our own wealth only, but the wealth of others; to look not on our own things only, but the things of others, and to be always zealously affected in a good thing. Many such are his commands; and can we be Christians, his faithful servants, his dutiful subjects, without obeying them? He himself was constantly zealous; sought his Father's glory in all he did, went about doing good, and fulfilled all righteousness. Now, what contempt doth it show of his dignity, excellency, and authority,—of his precepts, and example,—when we are lukewarm, and look upon zeal for his things as unnecessary or impertinent! Let us consider,

2. How much more important his things are than our own. How trifling and inconsiderable are all our things compared

with his ! Reflect seriously and impartially what your own things are. They only concern your bodies, and the present world ; in which you cannot continue long, and from which you may be soon removed. You are contriving for the prosperity and honour of your families, and ambitious to have "the glory of your houses increased." But you know not who shall inherit your riches ; whether they shall be wise men or fools, and use them as instruments of good or mischief. You are seeking after a world, "the fashion of which passeth away." You are delighted or grieved with things that are very fleeting. You are fond perhaps of being talked of and admired by men for a few days. In a few years, all the wealth you have laid up may be fled, and your families may be extinct ; and in a few more, you and they may be quite forgotten. And are these concerns worth so much care, and pains, and anxiety, as you employ about them ? The things of Christ have this to recommend them ; that they are valuable and glorious in themselves, and will last for ever. They relate to the present and eternal interest of rational, immortal spirits ; to the support of the church, on which the support of religion depends. The reputation of the gospel, in the sight of the ignorant and the careless, depends, in some measure, upon the zeal which professors show for it and the pains they take to promote its honour and interest. You can scarcely convince others, that there is any thing important and excellent in religion, except you show a zeal for it, proportioned to what you say of its importance. When the things of Christ are sought and flourish, the good order and happiness of society is promoted. What mends the spirits of men, will mend families and nations, and secure domestic and public happiness. You mistake the true interest of your children and families, if you only seek your own things and theirs. Religion will be their greatest glory and the only foundation of peace and happiness to them. It is of infinitely more importance that they be rich in faith and good works, than rich in this world ; that they be saved hereafter, than that they be great and honourable here. Let it be carefully remembered that the things of Christ relate to immortality. Let us reflect upon the worth of souls ; that they are beings formed for eternity. Let us consider the imminent danger they are in of perishing eternally, and the immensity of that happiness, which our zeal may, through divine grace, prepare them for, and lead them to. And can any thing better deserve our zeal, than to save souls from eternal death, and hide a multitude of sins ; and to give them, and so give ourselves, the highest joy of which a rational mind is capable ? To do our part to keep religion in countenance, and enlarge and strengthen the church and interest of Christ ; to leave a godly seed behind us, which shall support religion when we are gone ; surely these are much more important concerns than our secular

interest. And when they come in competition, our substance, our ease, our reputation, and even our lives, are to be cheerfully given up. The justice and force of this argument will further appear from considering, what Christ himself did and suffered to answer this end; the design and tendency of divine revelations, and all that God hath done to establish the gospel and support the church. To which I may add, that those earthly blessings, which too many prefer to the things of Christ, were given them by Providence with this view, that they might draw their hearts to God, and promote in them a deep concern about better things, the salvation of their own souls, and the souls of those around them. They were given to make them more extensively useful, which very much depends on the zeal and fervour of their spirits. How wrong is it then to pervert the bounties of Providence, and ungratefully misapply them about present things only, which are trifling and perishing! Let us consider,

3. How many oppose or neglect the concerns of Christ. What zeal they show in opposition to them, or for other things of much less importance. This thought led St. Paul, in the context, to mention and applaud Timothy's zeal; and the thought will have great weight with every pious, generous mind. Satan hath always been, and still is, opposing the things of Christ. He hindered the apostles in their work, excited persecution against them, and fomented dissension and slander. He is still trying all his cunning, malicious arts to raise persecution and strife against zealous Christians; to put them under an ill name and bring a reproach upon their zeal. He seeks the spread of ignorance, vice, and misery with unwearied pains. These are his own things; and he is eagerly and constantly zealous for them. He incessantly "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Him, therefore, let us resist, stedfast in the faith," and labour to counterwork his malicious designs. All the wicked in general oppose the things of Christ; and under this character I fear we must range many of the rich, honourable, and learned, who have great influence over others. There is a secret enmity to God and godliness in every carnal heart. Many are not satisfied that their own disorderly lives should oppose the interest of Christ, but they attempt to corrupt the principles and morals of all about them, and lead them to make light of Christ and despise or disobey his gospel. They ridicule those who are sober and serious; they have a particular spite against those who are active and zealous; and they think they show their wit, when they deride, what they call, "the heroic passion of saving souls." And oh! what dreadful, eager, unwearied zeal do they show to debase, enslave, and ruin them! They take counsel together against the Lord and his Anointed; strengthen one another's hands; and labour to keep vice in countenance. They blush not

at their irregularities; they are seldom afraid or ashamed to avow their wickedness, or of attempts to make others the children of hell like themselves. How diligent, cheerful, and indefatigable are they in the impious service! They labour and toil; disoblige and grieve all their real friends; venture upon danger and disgrace; ruin their fortunes and health, and die martyrs to sin and lust; while the friends of religion are lazy, lukewarm, and cowardly. The zeal of these sinners, yea the zeal of the men of the world, who are not so abandoned, should shame our indolence. This is a double argument and motive. We should be more zealous, because they are so wicked; that we may counterwork and defeat their mischievous designs; and their zeal in a bad cause should quicken ours in a good one. Their undaunted resolution and industry should shame us out of our coldness and inconstancy. Recollect, further, that the corruptions and imperfections of our own hearts oppose the things of Christ. We have a party within us against him. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." We are ready to make the neglects of others an excuse for our own, and "because iniquity abounds, our love waxeth cold." A consciousness of our own defects and imperfections damps our ardour. Therefore we have need both to guard and rouse our spirits, and strive to keep them active in the service of Christ. Reflect, likewise, how many, who, we hope, are sincere Christians, too much neglect the things of Christ. How much reason is there for the complaint in the text! Christ's professed servants, his people, yea his ministers too, are apt to trifle, and "their works are not found filled up before God."* They are warm and active in other things, but cold and languid here. Consider how zealous many good men are for little things; for important nothings. It may truly be said of some objects of their zeal, that they are not the things of Christ; of others, that they are the least of his things; of little value and weight in his religion. What zeal do they show for particular phrases, forms, and ceremonies, for human standards and traditions, and for party distinctions! What zeal for doctrines, confessedly mysterious and unintelligible, and about which wise and good men in every age have differed; and which therefore undoubtedly are not essential to religion and salvation! What zeal and pains to be at the head of a party, or considerable in it, or to make proselytes to it! While there hath been very little zeal for the *indisputables*; for holiness and usefulness of life, and conformity to the rules of the gospel. How violent, fiery, and bitter hath the former zeal been; and what dreadful effects hath it produced in the church! But how little is seen of that "wisdom which is from above, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy!" Now, the more opposition is made to Christ's cause,

* Rev. iii. 2.

and the more negligence we observe in them who profess to espouse it, and the more we see of an ignorant, unhallowed, mischievous zeal—the more solicitous we should be to seek the things of Christ. It should stir us up to do so much the more, in order to make up the lack of service in others, who have ability for it and are under the strongest obligations to it. In such a state of things, there is room and reason for the utmost efforts of the friends of Christ and religion; for all of them, according to their respective stations, circumstances, and connexions, to exert themselves. Let us further consider,

4. How inconsistent it is with our profession, obligations, and engagements to neglect the things of Christ. I might here urge the obligations you are under as men, upon the common principles of humanity and benevolence. If you have any love to your families, as parents and masters; if you have any love to others, as men and members of society; any concern for their comfort and happiness, it should show itself by seeking their eternal welfare; for they are all immortal creatures. To neglect this shows great inhumanity, as well as a stupid insensibility of your obligations and duties, as partakers of the same human nature. You profess yourselves Christians, and this strengthens the obligation. You call Christ Master and Lord; and so he is. Now, what is the duty of servants, but with diligence and fidelity to seek their master's interest, and to consult the honour and prosperity of his family? You expect this from your servants: and doth not Christ expect the same from you? "If he be a master, where is his honour and fear?" Consider the matter in another light. You have listed under his banner, as the Leader of your faith and the Captain of salvation. You profess thereby to espouse his cause, oppose his enemies, and promote the interest of his kingdom. And will you not be faithful to him, who hath called you to be soldiers? You have entered his service as volunteers, have engaged in this good warfare, and sworn fidelity to your divine Leader. But I touched upon this thought under a former head, when I was urging Christ's authority over us. This argument ought to have peculiar weight with those who have joined themselves, by some public solemn act, to a Christian church. Christ hath directed his disciples to form themselves into sacred societies, for their mutual edification and comfort. He that is joined to any particular church and continues in the fellowship of it, in breaking of bread, or receiving the Lord's supper, and in prayers, is not only obliged to seek the general good of Christ's kingdom, but to consult the honour and interest of that church, to which he is united, in particular. He is, with special attention and diligence, to seek the good of that religious community to which he stands related. This view of Christian churches, and the obligations of their members, is both scriptural and very important. But I fear it is not considered, but very

much forgotten; else there would appear in us more zeal for the honour and welfare of the particular societies to which we belong.* I would add further, that they who bear any particular office in a church of Christ, whether pastors, teachers, or deacons; or have undertaken to manage any of its temporal concerns, as wardens, overseers, or trustees, or by whatever name they are called; such persons are under peculiar obligations to seek the things of Christ, cheerfully to give their time, thought, and labour, to serve that particular church. If they neglect their duty herein, they are guilty of hypocrisy and treachery in undertaking the office and the trust. You would justly blame a friend, who neglected any important affair with which you had, by his own consent, entrusted him. You would justly blame an executor or guardian, who did not discharge the trust, which he had voluntarily undertaken. Apply the thought on yourselves: and you will soon see, that you cannot be indifferent to the things of Christ, that you cannot neglect the concerns of his religion in general, nor those of the church to which you are related, without dealing deceitfully, incurring the blame of your fellow-Christians, and being exposed to the displeasure of your Lord, with whom you do, in effect, prevaricate. Show yourselves therefore honest men and faithful Christians, by being zealous for the Lord Jesus. Let us likewise consider,

5. We shall most effectually seek our own things by seeking the things of Christ. It will be for your honour and every way for your advantage, both for this and the future world, if you are zealous. It will be for your honour. You perhaps neglect this duty through fear of man. You are ashamed to distinguish yourself in a good work, lest you should be censured or laughed at. But do not your consciences tell you, that it is your duty not to be moved by the censures and ridicule of men, when you are fully persuaded in your own minds, that the cause which you espouse is good? Do not reason and scripture concur to show you that God requires this zeal from you, that he will be pleased with your exerting it, and that he will put honour upon you? Is it not described in scripture as the characteristic of the worst times, that "men shall be lovers of themselves;" and of good men in such times, that they are "zealous for the Lord of hosts?" None but fools, and they who sit in the seat of the scornful, will censure and deride you; by all wise and good men you will be had in honour. Yea some, that may openly make a jest of you, will secretly esteem you. But let it be sufficient for you to reflect that God hath declared, "Them that honour me I will honour;"† and that Christ, the Judge, whose things you seek, "will confess your name before his Father and the holy angels.‡"

* I would recommend to the reader's perusal Dr. Priestley's Essay on Church Discipline, and Mr. Turner's Tract on Social Religion.

† 1 Sam. ii. 30.

‡ Mark viii. 38.

By this zeal you will resemble the blessed God, who is good to all, and continually worketh for the happiness of the creation; you will resemble our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our salvation came down from heaven, and lived and died for our good. Consider, further, that your temporal interest will be promoted by your pious zeal. You judge otherwise perhaps, as many do. But this is through want of faith. For if there be any truth in the word of God, you must be mistaken. "Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come." Your circumstances will never be really injured by prudent charity. What is contributed to the support of religion is especially "lent to the Lord," and he will certainly repay it. He will bless the substance of the zealous Christian. Whereas he often blasts the labours and substance of those, who, like the Jews in the prophet Haggai's days, suffer his house to lie waste, while they spend freely, and perhaps extravagantly, in adorning their own houses. If they should prosper in the world, their blessings are cursed, and anguish and sorrow of heart attend their favourite enjoyments. By pious zeal you will entail a blessing on your families. "A just man, who walks in his integrity" and seeks the glory of Christ and his church, may be assured from the divine promise, that "his children will be blessed after him."* Let your conduct then be directed by the rule of Christ, and your hearts animated by his promises; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all needful blessings of this world shall be added to you;"† whereas "withholding more than is meet tendeth to poverty," and the penurious man taketh the ready way to impoverish himself or his children. But to be zealous for Christ will undoubtedly secure the prosperity of your souls. Solomon's observation is true with regard to the interest of the soul, as well as the concerns of earth, "The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth," that relieves and refreshes others, "shall be watered also himself."‡ "The merciful man," as he also observes, "doeth good to his own soul."|| It hath been said that "self-love and social are the same." This is the case in the duty we have been considering. As you increase in holiness, you will find so much peace and comfort in it, as will excite you to promote it in others; and in proportion to the pains you take in this benevolent work, your own graces will flourish. For the common principle will be strengthened which leads you to seek your own happiness and theirs. You have also reason to expect peculiar help and consolation from the Spirit of God, while you are working with him for the edification of others. In order to enforce this duty, let me further remind you, that the time is coming, and may be near, when you must die. And what sort of reflections will give you most comfort in languishing sick-

* Prov. xx. 7.

† Prov. xi. 25.

‡ Matt. vi. 20.

§ Prov. xi. 17.

ness and dying moments? That you had been principally seeking your own things, or the things of Christ? That you had been laying by treasures upon earth, or treasures in heaven? That you had spent all your zeal about the world and your families, or your chief zeal about the interest of religion? After death, there is the judgment, and you must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Inquiry will then be made, what you did for him and his cause while in this world. And is it not desirable to be able to give a good account of our fidelity and zeal? God will plentifully reward his active servants. "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." Nay, "God is not unrighteous to forget any work and labour of love for the honour of his name." "Even a cup of cold water, given to a disciple, shall not lose its reward." Christ will estimate and repay what we have done for his churches and brethren, as if done to himself. Have we no concern, then, how we shall stand in the judgment? No concern for our own eternal safety and joy? Have we lost self-love as well as love to man? Shall we despise the honours and rewards which our Lord hath promised, and prefer the fading trifles of earth before them? Let our drowsy souls be awakened by such a motive as this, to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Take a review now of these arguments in their connexion. Consider the dignity and authority of Christ; the superior importance of his concerns; how shamefully his interest is opposed and neglected in the world; how inconsistent it is with our profession, obligations, and engagements to neglect it; and how injurious to our own honour, prosperity, and happiness, both in this and the future world. The other motive, taken from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to us, with the application of the subject, must be considered hereafter. I conclude this discourse with those encouraging and delightful words of the prophet Malachi, concerning some who showed a faithful and active zeal for the support of religion in a very lukewarm and degenerate age. "The Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."*

* Mal. iii. 16, 17.

DISCOURSE III.

PHILIPPIANS II. 21.

For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

I AM once more to recommend unto you, and urge upon you, brethren, a pious, active zeal for the interest of Christ and the advancement of religion. There is no reason to complain, in the general, of the want of active zeal in the world ; but unfortunately it terminates upon objects of the least importance to human happiness. Men are usually most zealous where they should be least so, where moderation and indifference would be commendable ; and least zealous where lukewarmness and indifference are criminal and shameful ; or, in the language of the text, they “seek their own things,” their ease, safety, wealth, and reputation, “more than the things of Christ ;” the honour of God, the support of religion, and the salvation of immortal souls. I have largely shown you, that the observation in the text is true of the present age ; that it appears in persons being more intent upon the prosperity of their own families, than of the church of Christ ; their being backward to devote a due proportion of their labour, time, and substance, to the service of Christ ; their being hindered from seeking his things by difficulties and discouragements, which very little affect them when seeking their own. It appears in their resenting injuries and affronts offered to themselves, more than those that are offered to the Lord Jesus ; in their neglecting the souls of others, while they are concerned for their bodily interests ; in their backwardness to assist and encourage those who are seeking the things of Christ ; in not exerting a zeal for his interest, proportioned to their abilities and opportunities ; and in being more zealous for particular modes of faith and forms of worship than the essentials of Christian truth and duty. In order to guard you against these evils, and excite you to be more zealous for your Redeemer and your fellow-Christians, I urged various considerations and motives ; particularly Christ's great and inconceivable dignity, the excellency of his character, and his authority over you. I represented to you how much more important Christ's things are than your own, as they relate to the soul and eternity. I showed you what opposition is made to the interest of Christ, by Satan, by all wicked men, and by the corruptions of our own hearts ; and how very zealous the enemies of Christ are in this opposition. I pointed out to you, how negligent even his friends are in seeking his things, while they are zealous, too zealous, for things of little or no importance in religion. I endeavoured to convince you how inconsistent lukewarmness and indifference are with our relation to one another as men, our profession and engagements as

Christians, and our union with a particular Christian church, especially if we have undertaken any office or trust for its benefit. I then showed how much it would be for your honour, your present interest and comfort, your peace in death, and your future eternal glory, to seek the things of Christ, that self-love may concur with social to animate you to it. I am now to add another motive to excite and support your zeal, which is so important and so forcible, that I was willing to give it a larger consideration than I could in the last discourse; and that is,

6. Consider how diligently and earnestly the Lord Jesus Christ sought, and is still seeking, your interest. Let me entreat you, first, to reflect, what a kind, affectionate, zealous concern he hath already shown for your best, your eternal interest. That you may have a right apprehension of this, it is necessary seriously to reflect, how much we wanted his friendly concern and gracious interposition for us. I need not prove at large, what you so well know; and are, and must be, often reminded of, that we were fallen and departed from God; had lost our purity and innocence; and were, by our sins, exposed to the everlasting condemnation of the righteous Governor and Judge of the world. Neither human nor angelic wisdom could contrive means to rescue us from this deplorable state. The infinite wisdom and love of God our Father formed a scheme to deliver us. The Son of God cheerfully undertook the work and with amazing resolution completed it. When he came on that errand, "he put on righteousness as his breastplate, and was clad with zeal as with a cloak."* Consider what a series of labours, abasement, and sufferings, he went through in seeking our things. He emptied himself, left the heavenly world, resigned for a while his own things, "the glory he had with the Father before the foundation of the world," and dwelt in mortal flesh. When he was upon earth, he "pleased not himself,"† he sought not his own ease, wealth, and honour; but voluntarily submitted to labour and toil, hunger and thirst, shame and reproach, to pain of body and anguish of spirit, and at length to death in its most terrible form; and all this, that he might promote our interest. We are discouraged by fear of man, of reproach, or even banter. But remember how he was treated for our sake. He was blasphemed, reviled, and evil spoken of. "They that sat in the gate," the great men, rulers, and judges, "spake against him, and he was the song of the drunkards."‡ Yet he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and went boldly on, facing the malice and rage of hell. Who could be worse used than he was? Which of his servants ever suffered more? Yet zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of men fired his heart. All this he did and suffered, and much more, for our service and benefit. Now is it not reasonable that we should

* Isaiah lix. 17, 18.

† Rom. xv. 3.

‡ Psalm lxxix. 22.

make him the best returns in our power? And what doth he expect, but that we love him, and keep his commandments; that we love our brethren for his sake; and especially remember this command, to seek the things of others, and promote their holiness and salvation? He hath a cause and interest on earth, which he expects us to espouse. There is nothing dearer to him than this; for he shed his blood to further it. He requires us, from a principle of gratitude, to do what we can to promote it. Let us seriously and frequently reflect, that the end of his incarnation, preaching, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, is to advance our best interest. And shall we have no concern about his? May he not say to the lukewarm Christian, O trifler, did I do all this for thee, and hast thou no heart to serve me? Hast thou neither money, nor time, nor hands, nor tongue, to employ for me? Observe how the apostle states this argument in the beginning of the chapter where our text is; "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God," when he appeared to the patriarchs and prophets of old, "was not eager to retain that likeness," did not covet to appear in a divine form, after his incarnation,* "but made himself of no reputation," emptied himself of his original glory, "and took upon him the form of a servant;" yea humbled himself still lower, by becoming "obedient to death, even the death of the cross." Now did he thus empty and humble himself, that we might be indifferent to his name and honour? Did he come down to earth, live and die for the salvation of men, that we may be unconcerned whether they are saved or not? How contradictory to all his love and works, his warfare and sufferings, is our lukewarmness in his ways. What contempt doth it put upon his gospel, his blood and grace, as if we looked upon them all as unnecessary, unimportant things, and were to do nothing to advance his kind designs. But this is not all. Let us consider, further, that he is still seeking our things. He is gone into heaven, seated at the right hand of God, and made head and lord of all. But he is not unmindful of our concerns there. He pleads his blood before the throne of God, and maketh continual intercession for us. He governs the world for our good; supports the gospel and the church upon earth for our sakes. In the course of his providence he continueth a succession of Christian ministers. He sends down his Spirit to work upon our languid hearts, and add efficacy to those ordinances which he hath appointed to keep alive our love and zeal. His supper is particularly instituted with this view; that, by remembering his dying love and the zeal he showed for us, we might be excited to be zealous for

* See Bishop Sherlock's Sermons, vol. iv. p. 26; Marshall's Sermons, vol. i. serm. 13, p. 308.

him. Whenever we attend that ordinance, this thought should possess our minds, that it is a fresh call, motive, and obligation to seek the things of Christ. In short, it is described as the great end for which "Christ gave himself for us, that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."* So that by neglecting his service and interest, we demonstrate ourselves to be unworthy of redemption, and in effect defeat the very end of Christ's undertaking. Surely, my brethren, if we more closely and frequently meditated on the love of Christ, we could not be so cold and indifferent to his things as we are. Our hearts would burn within us, to do as much as possible for him and his cause, who hath done, and is still doing, so much for us. And if any should censure us for as too zealous, or cast a reflection upon us, as they did upon St. Paul, we should think it sufficient to make the same apology for it as he did; "The love of Christ constraineth us, while we thus judge, that if one died for all then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again."†

Thus, after many other arguments to excite and maintain your Christian zeal, I have urged upon you, as the most forcible, the affection, diligence, and zeal, with which our adorable Redeemer sought and is still seeking our things. What remains of the subject is some reflections and exhortations founded upon it.

APPLICATION.

1. *Since there is so much reason to make the complaint in the text, let us deeply lament this shameful neglect in ourselves and others.* St. Paul could not mention the zeal of Timothy, in the preceding verse, without expressing, in the text, his great concern and grief, that it was so uncommon; that there were none equally active; nay, few really zealous. Almost all the rest were self-seekers. And have not we reason for such a lamentation? Take a view first of the New Testament. Observe carefully, what love to men, and zeal for their salvation, Christ himself showed. Observe how exactly the apostles trod in his steps, and, like him, went about doing good, unmoved by reproaches and jests, by bonds, afflictions, and death. Observe, what love and zeal, what activity and resolution, the gospel requires of us. When you have considered these things, then reflect on the state of the world about us. Think how many, instead of serving Christ, reject and ridicule his gospel; how many, who profess to believe it, provoke and insult its divine Author by their irregularities; and how many, of more decent characters, have no zeal but for their own things. How few, very few, seem to have any concern for the salvation of others! Where are the private Christians, I had almost said, where are the ministers, whose

* Titus ii. 14.

† 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

hearts glow with this sacred disposition, and exert their utmost to seek the interest of Christ? They seek their own ease, wealth, and honour; they seek their gain from their quarter; and their ambition in these points is seldom satisfied. But they will do no more for Christ than what they think they cannot decently and without censure omit. This is alas! too evident. We cannot but see it; and ought it not to be lamented? Doth it not show a great want of zeal in ourselves, that while we see it, we do not lament it? that our hearts are not more affected with it, and that we do not more deeply bewail it before God? How unlike are we to David, who saith, "My zeal hath consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten thy words."* How unlike are we to our divine Master, of whom it was said in prophecy, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," consumed my very vitals, "and the reproaches of them that reproached thee have fallen upon me," and have affected me more than those thrown upon myself.† But you must excuse me, brethren, if I apply the reflection to ourselves; otherwise I should be chargeable with the very fault mentioned in the text. As to myself, I do thus publicly and solemnly acknowledge my own faults in this respect; and earnestly pray and desire the help of your prayers, that God would forgive me. And, as one method of amending of them, I would endeavour to promote your humiliation and penitence before God. Can it be said of you, that you sincerely and zealously seek the things of Christ? What you do in the religious care and private instruction of your own families, what pains you take to save the souls of your children and servants, a minister can hardly be a sufficient judge. But if any of you neglect daily family worship, you are undoubtedly and grossly deficient in your zeal. If there be any real concern in you for the salvation of others, as I would hope there is, I fear it is very weak, languid, and confined; for an active zeal cannot be hid. Are you all, especially heads of families and those of fortune and influence, daily contriving and labouring for the interest of Christ? Do you go beyond the narrow limits of your families, and exert yourselves in exhorting and admonishing one another; beginning and encouraging religious discourse in every company where you prudently can? Do you speak kindly to the poorest, who regularly attend public worship, and endeavour to animate them? Do you study to help and encourage your ministers in their sacred work? I see and hear very little of this spirit, but much of a general lukewarmness and indifference. Excuse my freedom, brethren. Our Lord Jesus Christ will be more free with you in a little time; and it becomes you immediately and seriously to consider, how you will answer his awful inquiries. Carefully observe, how he expresseth himself concerning those churches whose character this was.

* Ps. cxix. 139.

† Ps. lxi. 9: John ii. 17; Rom. xv. 3.

Of the church of Ephesus; "Nevertheless," though thou hast several good qualities, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."* This was also the case of the church of Laodicea, to which he saith, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will cast thee out of my mouth" with detestation.† They thought themselves "rich, and increased in goods, and that they needed nothing;" that they were a very respectable society and an honour to Christianity; but there may be, as there was in them, much lukewarmness and spiritual poverty, where there is much spiritual pride. The Head of the church, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, cannot be deceived. Let us diligently observe, what is so plainly suggested in these awful threatenings, that if a lukewarm and indifferent spirit prevaieth in Christian churches, their great Lord will be much displeased, and they are in danger of losing their distinguishing privileges and advantages. If this spirit continues and increases among us, we shall provoke our neglected, affronted Lord to take away his gospel from us, and give it to a people who will make a better improvement of it. He may suffer the errors and corruptions of popery, and all its sanguinary terrors, again to overspread our land. Or he may take away the influences of his Spirit from our churches; then they will be as a dead carcase without an animating soul; the means of grace will lose their effect; the power which religious principles, and especially the fear of God, have over the minds of men, will be lost: and thus our country will soon become a scene of confusion and desolation. Let us therefore "not be high-minded but fear, and know, in this our day, the things that belong to our peace." Let us, with godly sorrow, bewail the coldness of others and especially our own. This will help to keep our hearts humble and tender, and so increase our activity for the future.

2. *Let us seriously consider how we may do Christ more service than we have hitherto done; and set ourselves vigorously about it.* Let me address you as Christ doth the church of Sardis; "Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God."‡ Consider the importance of the things of Christ, and the vast difference between things seen and unseen, temporal and eternal. Carefully estimate your capacities, circumstances, and influence over others. Take a frequent and serious view of your stations and connexions in life; of your children, servants, workmen; of those who are dependent upon you; of your neighbours who are under various obligations to you; of your friends, with whom

* Rev. ii. 4, 5.

† Rev. iii. 16, 17.

‡ Rev. iii. 2.

you can be free. Reflect, that all of them are immortal creatures, to whom you are capable of being useful. Show your zeal for Christ and love to them, by reproving, exhorting, or encouraging, as their circumstances require; by giving or lending them useful books, and by praying for them. Consider your substance, and what you ought in conscience to devote to the service of Christ and the support of religion. Be desirous and thankful that proper objects and services should be recommended to you; and labour after more of the temper of a religious tradesman, "who esteemed those that came to him to collect for pious and charitable uses, more welcome than if they had been some of his best customers."* When you distribute your charity, drop a word of exhortation to the receivers to fear God, and work out their own salvation; then it will be likely to be well taken, and have a good effect. Watch for occasions and opportunities to introduce some serious discourse in your friendly visits. Consider how much time is spent in them, and let it not all be wasted in impertinence. They who fear the Lord should often speak one to another upon the most important subjects; and "the lips of the righteous should feed many."† There are some affecting circumstances in life in which a hint of exhortation will have peculiar weight; as when any remarkable providence, either merciful or afflictive, interests the hearts of your friends and their families; then it will be a word in season. Thus endeavour by your zeal to quicken others. Let aged Christians be very watchful that they do not lose their zeal, but continue to speak of God's loving kindness, and be teachers of good things to this generation. Let not the young say, that zeal better becomes the old; but let them employ their vigorous and sprightly powers in the service of Christ, and shame the indolence of their seniors. Let not those in low stations and circumstances plead their poverty, obscurity, and weakness, as an excuse for lukewarmness. They may do much for Christ in their narrow sphere. Indeed, many serious, benevolent persons, when they consider the state of religion among us, are ready to despair and say, It is vain to attempt to revive it. But this is a very blameable disposition. Every one may do something in his own circle, be it ever so small; at least in his own family. Do you not see what corruption and misery others spread; how much mischief one single, obscure person sometimes doth; or, in the language of Solomon, "how much good one sinner destroys?"‡ Have you never observed nor read what good, extensive, and lasting effects have been produced by the labours of single persons; and some, too, no way eminent for learning or address? This should excite every good man to attempt to be useful. And when he is obeying the divine command, and hath God for his helper, he may, and will, do much more good than he ima-

* Barret's Life, p. 291.

† Prov. x. 21.

‡ Eccl. ix. 18.

gines. No doubt but God will give him some success ; and the little leaven of religion which he endeavours to mingle in the mass of mankind, may spread wider than he expected. In short, that more good is not done, is owing chiefly to this, that more is not attempted to be done. "It is good, therefore, to be always zealously affected in a good thing"* or cause. But remember that, while you are endeavouring to reform and edify others, the utmost care must be taken that your own conduct doth not contradict your exhortations. Let your own behaviour be so holy, just, and unblameable, that it may add authority and power to what you say. Thus "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."† Let me add, that while you are engaged in these excellent, godlike efforts, prudence and discretion should guide you, that your design may not be defeated, nor your good evil spoken of. But let me solemnly caution you against those false notions of prudence, which prevail in this lukewarm age, and lead many to confine their zeal to their own families, if indeed they show any in them. There is a pretended discretion which hath almost banished religious zeal from the world. So many rules are prescribed by some, or thought needful by others, about time and place, and the manner of address and management, that scarce any good can be done. This or the other counsel must not be administered, nor the guilty seriously admonished, lest they be offended, or seem to be reflected upon ; or the rules of fashion and politeness violated. Thus great and necessary duties are omitted, and the commands of God's word set aside through fear of man. A rash, imprudent behaviour is indeed criminal, and defeats intended good. But many things are now called imprudent, which are fit and laudable. Therefore let deliberate consideration, the word of God, and zeal for Christ, first determine what is right, and ought to be done ; and then let prudence be called in to attain the end. But let not lukewarmness put on the garb of discretion, lest it thrust zealous religion out of our societies, families, and hearts. It is our duty to be bold and resolute in the cause of God, that we may not be put out of countenance by scorners, and that those who are better disposed may see that we are in earnest. And what a great deal of good might each of us do, if we had a true zeal for Christ ! How many occasions and opportunities are put into our hands every day, which, if we were actuated by this principle, would render us faithful servants of Christ, and great benefactors to mankind, whatever are our stations and circumstances in life ! Yet how many, especially of the polite world, and of the higher ranks, are complaining that they want something to do, at least show that time hangs heavy on their hands. "Let them," saith a very zealous preacher,

* Gal. iv. 18.

† Matt. v. 16.

‘ but love Christ, and spend their whole time in his service, and they will find no dull, melancholy hours. Want of this is the chief cause of indolence and vapours. If they would rise and be doing for Jesus Christ, they would not complain of the want of spirits.”* Rouse yourselves, then, my brethren: seriously consider every morning, what you can do for Christ and your fellow Christians through the day. Ask your own hearts every evening, what you have done for him and them. Give no occasion to those, who serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own worldly interest, to say, Surely religion is no such desirable thing nor so necessary; or they who pretend to it would be more active and earnest to bring others to embrace it. Let us be “stedfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

3. *Let us esteem, assist, and pray for all those who are seeking the things of Jesus Christ.* You will observe with how much respect and affection St. Paul speaks of Timothy, just before the text; “I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state.” Thus he would recommend him to the esteem and love of the Philippians. When he afterwards mentions Epaphroditus, another faithful and zealous fellow-labourer, he commands them to “receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and to hold such” pious active men “in reputation.” And truly, honouring such persons is doing a great deal to support the interest of Christ. Let us therefore cherish and express an esteem for all that appear to have the cause of religion at heart, and are zealous to support it. All ministers of this character ought to be “esteemed very highly in love for their work’s sake;” especially those who give up secular advantages to serve their brethren in their most important concerns, and are endeavouring uprightly and vigorously to do it. To neglect them, not to assist and encourage them, is ungrateful, unkind, and even cruel. If any ministers (whether they are of our own persuasion or no, matters not) seem intent on advancing the cause of Christ, and the welfare of others, let us be very cautious how we behave towards them. They may be guilty of some imprudencies: they may hold some peculiar, injudicious sentiments, or have a tincture of enthusiasm. They may not have so good a judgment or clear manner of expression, as others. But if they appear to be actuated by good principles (which we should always suppose, unless there be evident reason to the contrary); if they attempt to promote the great end and design of Christianity and make men wise and holy, it is our duty not to speak evil of them, but to cover their imperfections; and to pray that God would direct their zeal in a more prudent manner. It is very observable, that censures upon such men are generally, and most readily, passed by those who have no zeal themselves.

* John Wesley.

And it is to be feared, that it is their seriousness and zeal, and not their weaknesses, which displease their lukewarm brethren, and open the mouth of censure and ridicule. If this be not the case, why do not the men of learning, judgment, and prudence, equally exert themselves to do good? Why do they not preach the word like men in earnest; be instant in season and out of season, teaching publicly and from house to house, as St. Paul did, and requires them to do; and thus outdo the persons whom they blame in their own way? Let us not allow ourselves to censure or despise any man who appears to be animated by zeal for Christ, and to mean well in his endeavour. "To his own master he stands or falls." If, upon due consideration, we do not think it our duty to encourage him, let us not hinder him. But when we see any regularly and judiciously zealous for the things of Christ, it is undoubtedly our duty to assist them, and strengthen their hands. Perhaps by attempting this, their superior zeal may quicken us, and our superior prudence may direct them. Further, it is our duty daily and earnestly to pray for all those, whether in public or private stations, who are seeking the things of Christ; particularly ministers, instructors of youth, and heads of families, that God would assist and prosper their pious labours. Thus, as St. Paul expresseth it, we may "help together by our prayers to God for them."* Such intercession for others will dispose us to be zealous, that we may not act an hypocritical part, and pray for that which we will not attempt to forward. The apostle John, speaking of some that went forth to preach the gospel, saith "We ought to receive such," give them all the countenance and assistance in our power, "that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth."† Finally, let us learn from the whole,

4. *How much we need the Spirit and grace of Christ to quicken our zeal and activity.* It appears, from what hath been said, that we need it at all times, especially at such a time as this, when love is grown cold; when so many oppose the cause of Christ, and so many neglect it; and when there is, I fear, an habitual disinclination in our hearts to do any thing for it. How much do we need enlivening, quickening grace, when there are so many instances of indolence in persons well qualified for usefulness; and when there is such a propensity in some of them to censure and despise those "whose zeal is a reproach, and whose lives are a scandal to them!"‡ We, my brethren, are, I hope, forming some good resolutions to seek the things of Christ more earnestly, and to watch against the contagion of ill examples. But let us form these resolutions in an humble dependence upon divine grace and with fervent prayers for it; else they will come to nothing. To show the necessity of this, observe the conduct of the apostles before and

* 2 Cor. i. 11.

† 3 John 8.

‡ Lord Halifax's Character of Bishop Burnet.

after the ascension of Christ; thence it plainly appears what divine influences can do. Before it they were all seeking their own things, contending who should be greatest, and enjoy the chief posts of honour and profit in that temporal kingdom, which they supposed their Master was about to establish. But after the descent of the Spirit upon them, when they received larger communications of his enlightening and sanctifying influences, as well as of his extraordinary gifts, they sought nothing but the things of Christ. They declined no labours nor sufferings for his sake, but rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame, reproach, and death, in his cause. Let us therefore pray that the influences of this Spirit may be communicated to us and to all around us; that these may preserve us from that inordinate self-love, and those mean and temporal views, which eat out the heart of godliness and zeal, and may so invigorate our spirits, that we may be able to say with St. Paul, concerning himself and fellow-Christians, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's."* Let those, who are in any degree zealous for the Lord, be careful that they do not "leave their first love," and grow cold amidst so many chilling circumstances. The habitual exercise of this grace will keep it lively, fill the heart with the most pleasing sensations, and open upon it the most delightful prospects. The grace of Christ will be communicated to every one who sincerely seeks it; and will be sufficient to maintain the ardour of his spirit, and make his pious efforts prosperous. But if our zeal be ever so warm, regular, and constant, and the good effects of it ever so many and extensive, let us still remember, that "when we have done all that is commanded, we are unprofitable servants." We shall find a thousand defects and imperfections to lament and be humbled for before God. We must still say, as the pious and zealous archbishop Usher did in his dying moments, "Lord, forgive me all my sins, especially my sins of omission." While the recollection of our zeal for the cause of Christ lays a just foundation for comfort and hope in our latter end, we shall mention it before God with the modesty and humility of Nehemiah. Though he was a most active, zealous, useful man, in promoting the civil and religious interests of Israel, yet he thus prays, "Remember me, O my God, for good, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy."† Thus humble must we be, and fix our dependence on the merits and mediation of our most righteous, benevolent, and adorable Redeemer, for the acceptance and reward of our best services.

* Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

† Neh. xiii. 14, 22.

Nevertheless, let us remember, for our encouragement, the assurance which the apostle gives us, that "God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love which we show towards his name, in ministering to the saints,"* especially serving them in their eternal concerns. But this thought I have already urged, and would now only remind you, that by seeking the things of Christ in the manner recommended, we shall be training up for the society of saints and angels above, who are all ardour, zeal, and activity, in the service of Christ and one another. May the Father of our spirits fill them with love and zeal, and stir them up to continued activity! Through his sacred powerful influences may we daily study, contrive, and labour to promote the honour of our divine Master and the interest of his religion. And whatever difficulties and discouragements arise before us, may we manifest the same firm and heroic temper that St. Paul did, when he said, "Bonds and afflictions await me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."† Amen.

* Heb. vi. 10.

† Acts xx. 24.

THREE DISCOURSES

ON

ETERNITY,

AND THE

IMPORTANCE AND ADVANTAGES OF LOOKING AT ETERNAL THINGS.

“What is here written is designed for thy help and furtherance in a meetness for future blessedness. But if thou look on these pages with a wanton rolling eye, hunting for novelties, or what may gratify a prurient wit, a coy and squeamish fancy ; go, read a romance or some piece of drollery ; know, here’s nothing for thy turn, and dread to meddle with matters of everlasting concernment without a serious spirit.”—HOWE.

P R E F A C E.

THE following discourses, on a most weighty and interesting subject, are recommended to your serious perusal. If you are not prone to forget eternity amidst the cares and amusements of life, and do not want to have your mind more deeply impressed with its momentous concerns, you are a Christian of distinguished eminence, and I congratulate your happiness. But such a character being as uncommon as it is glorious, you are probably conscious that you need to have your mind stirred up by way of remembrance, concerning the things that belong to your everlasting peace. If you are a stranger to the author, it signifies little to you of what party or persuasion he is. Candidly believe him to be honest and well-meaning. Consider that eternity is no party subject, but the common concern of all ages, ranks, and denominations. It is very likely that some of his reasoning and arguments, upon a subject which hath its difficulties, may not be clear and satisfactory to you; but you may perhaps meet with something, at least in the reflections, which may do you good. You will not find these discourses so judicious, correct, and elegant, as many others which you may have read. The author's design was to come home to men's business and bosoms. For this end he hath waived rather than studied ornaments, being sensible that a sermon, like a tool, may be polished till it has no edge. He has endeavoured to use such plain and familiar language, that even readers of the lowest understanding may at once see and feel his meaning. Defective as these discourses are, an hour or two devoted to the perusal of them may afford you more satisfaction than the same time spent in mere amusement, or in reading a better book on a subject of less importance. In publishing them, the author hath obliged many of his friends who desired it; endeavoured to do a little good to his fellow-Christians in his own way; he hath commended them to the blessing of God, which hath already, in some degree, attended them; and he cheerfully

leaves the issue with him, without being very solicitous about the reception they may meet with in the world. If you desire to profit by the perusal of these discourses, he entreats and hopes that you will first lift up your heart to God in such language as this:—

O God, the fountain of wisdom, truth, and goodness; the high and lofty One that inhabitest eternity, whose name is holy; graciously assist thy servant to read these discourses with a serious attentive mind; that I may not rest in the language or the sentiment, in commending or condemning them, but may consider my own concern in them. May I read them as addressed to my conscience; and, as far as what they contain appears agreeable to thine unerring word, may I receive and submit to it as an oracle of God, and judge myself by it. Teach me, O God of all grace, to profit by them; that the time I spend in reading and meditating upon them may not be lost. May they afford me present instruction and lasting benefit, and thus tend to increase my glory and felicity through eternity. And may the author of these discourses, and all others, who sincerely endeavour to promote the welfare of immortal souls, see some good effect of their labours on earth, and, at length, by thy grace, partake with me of the joys of thine eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.

ON ETERNITY.

DISCOURSE I.

2 CORINTHIANS IV. 18.

But the things which are not seen are eternal.

WHEN Archbishop Leighton was minister of a parish in Scotland, this question was asked of the ministers at their provincial meetings; "If they preached the duties of the times?" When it was found that Mr. Leighton did not, and he was blamed for the omission, he answered, "If all the brethren have preached to the times, may not one poor brother be suffered to preach on eternity?"* In most ages of the church, there has been too much reason to complain that Christian ministers have dwelt more than they ought upon subjects of comparatively small importance. They have too much neglected the momentous concerns of eternity; or not treated of them with that plainness, seriousness, and deep impression of their importance, which they ought to have done. Ye are witnesses, my friends, and God also, that I have often laid these most interesting themes before you; and, instead of amusing you with trifles, am wholly directing my ministrations to your eternal salvation: and this I will do, while providence gives me opportunity, as your souls are very dear to me, and as I desire to give such an account of my fidelity, as will be comfortable to myself, and acceptable to him, whose I am, and whom I serve. With this view it is proper sometimes to lay before you a large and distinct representation of the nature of that state and world to which we are all hastening; and as I am persuaded that no topic is more suited to the times, to restrain the licentiousness of this giddy, thoughtless, luxurious age, give me leave again to direct your attention to it. My design at this time is, to discourse to you, as seriously and plainly as I possibly can, concerning *eternity*; the most weighty and awful word in the whole compass of language; a word which we often hear, but its vast meaning and importance none of us I fear sufficiently consider.

The apostle is, in the context, telling the Corinthians, what it was that supported his mind under all his afflictions and persecutions; and that was the hope and prospect of a blessed immortality, for which they tended to prepare him. This was what he "looked at," aimed at, and pursued: and the reason of his intensely looking at it, and solicitously pursuing it was, that

* Select Works of Abp. Leighton. Pref. p. 11.

“the things which are seen,” the objects of sense, and which this world presents to our view, “are temporal,” or temporary, of short and uncertain continuance; “but the things which are not seen,” which are not the objects of sense, but of faith, “are eternal.” I propose, by divine assistance,

I. To illustrate in a few words the general nature of eternity;

II. To consider it with particular application to our own souls, their immortal nature, and future eternal state; and then endeavour, which is my chief design, to impress these things upon your hearts and my own, by suitable reflections, exhortations, and motives. “The things which are not seen are eternal.”

Eternal! what a loud alarm does this give to the soul! and how should it awaken the conscience of every hearer! surely, Sirs, if any subject deserves your composed and serious attention, this doth; and may God accompany it with his blessing! I am,

I. To illustrate the general nature of eternity.

But who can explain it? who can comprehend it? We are quickly lost in the contemplation of so amazing a subject, and the understanding of an angel would faint under the mighty task. Bear then with my weakness, brethren, while, out of a pure concern for your happiness, I say a little in my poor imperfect way about it. Eternity is duration, without limits. What hath no beginning and no end is, properly speaking, eternal. There are some creatures in the universe which have a beginning and an end; as the whole brutal creation. There are some beings which had a beginning but shall have no end; such are angels and the spirits of men. These are properly everlasting, but not eternal; though that word is sometimes applied to them both in scripture and common language. There is one Being in the universe, who is strictly and properly eternal, and no other being but himself is or can be so; even the ever blessed and adorable God. There never was a time when he was not. His duration is not capable of being measured by any periods of time ever so often repeated and multiplied. I shall not enter into that question, with which some learned men have perplexed themselves and their readers, whether the divine eternity be successive or instantaneous; whether it be a real duration, or only one single point or instant. It is sufficient for us to know that he is eternal, according to the best idea we can gain of the meaning of that word; and that his infinite mind comprehends, at one view, every thing past, present, and future, in every period and instant of his eternal duration. He is represented to us, in the scriptures, as “the same from everlasting, and to everlasting;” as “the uncorruptible God; who only hath immortality; who was, and is, and is to come; the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity.” “We have not, indeed, a positive, adequate, and comprehensive view of eternity; no

created being hath so; it is the prerogative of the infinite and eternal Mind. But we can conceive of it after an obscure and inadequate manner. Our conception of it is somewhat like the survey a man takes of the ocean from on board a ship sailing in the midst of it. He sees the ocean, though not the whole ocean; and where his sight is terminated by its own weakness, can perceive that the ocean extends further than he can see. Conceive a mountain of sand rising up to the stars; though this amazing heap be supposed to waste but a single grain every million of years, it will in time be exhausted and sink down to a level; but eternity will never, never be all spent; when innumerable ages have run out, it will be as far from ending as ever, because indeed it hath no end.* Our thoughts are lost and our spirits overwhelmed, when we set ourselves to contemplate how great, weighty, and extensive a thing eternity is. But we can form an idea of it sufficient to answer all moral and religious purposes; and that is enough. Let us now,

II. *Consider eternity with particular application to our own souls, their immortal nature, and future everlasting state.*

Our souls are unseen things, and the world to which they go is an unseen world; and nothing will be more useful to us than to reflect that they are everlasting.

1. Our souls are immortal or everlasting. Man consisteth of two parts; the one gross, visible, and material, which is the body; the other spiritual, unseen, and immaterial, and this is the soul or spirit; so we call that principle which animates the body; which is capable of thinking, reflecting, comparing, and choosing, of looking back to what has been, and forward to what shall be, and reasoning upon both. These souls God formed; for he is "the Father of spirits."† There was a time when they were not; when their existence began: so that, properly speaking, they are not eternal; but they are everlasting. This mortal life has a beginning and end. The existence of the soul had a beginning, but it shall have no end. This is argued from the very nature of the soul, so greatly different from the nature of the body. The soul does not derive its being from the body, nor depend upon the state of the body for its continuance in being. It is a simple, unmixed, indivisible principle: being immaterial, it must be incorruptible and immortal; not being compounded of parts, as the body is, it cannot be dissolved. We argue the existence and activity of the soul, after the death of the body, from its powers and faculties, its capacity of extending its views into futurity, which the brutes cannot; as well as feeling such joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, as they do not. It has an earnest desire of continuance in being, and a dread of annihilation and destruction. Now, it can hardly be thought that its

* Grove's Works, vol. i. p. 49.

† Heb. xii. 9.

wise and good Creator would have implanted these capacities and inclinations in it, had it not been designed for an immortal duration. The powers of conscience, and that dread of a future state, which guilt occasions in all, are justly reckoned standing proofs of its immortality. The unequal distribution of good and evil in the present state, according to the real character of rational beings and moral agents, plainly speaks an hereafter. And, indeed, this was the general sentiment of the heathen world, and appears to be the dictate of nature. Though the heathen discovered the existence of the soul, and a state of rewards and punishments after death, yet some of them doubted whether that state would be everlasting, and the rest were much in the dark about it; not to mention the case of those few who denied it. But, on a point of so much importance, the scriptures give us the clearest light, and solve every reasonable doubt. The sacred writers do not set themselves directly to prove the everlasting duration of the soul; but seem to take it for granted as an obvious, allowed principle; just as they do the existence of God. The immortality of the soul is a principle on which all the divine dispensations are founded. Nevertheless they assert it in a variety of places; and it will be proper to mention a few of them, that our faith in this important article may stand on a firm foundation. Our Lord argues the future existence of the soul against the Sadducees, who denied it, from God's calling himself "the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob" many years after their death; "for God," saith he, "is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him."* The Old Testament writers in many places speak of it: particularly Solomon, when he saith, "The righteous hath hope in his death;"† when "the dust returneth to the earth as it was, the spirit shall return unto God, who gave it." He makes an observable distinction between the spirit of brutes and of men; "Who knoweth the spirit of man, that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"‡ And that the spirits of men are immortal, seems to be intimated by David, when he saith, "At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore;" and, "When my flesh and my heart faileth, God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."§ But we have clearer proofs of this in the New Testament. Our Lord asserts that, though men may kill the body, they "cannot kill the soul."|| If the soul died with the body, or ceased to think and act after death, they might kill the soul as well as the body. He likewise asserts, that in the future world men "can die no more, for they are," in immortality, "equal to the angels."¶ The apostles speak of "being unclothed, putting off the body," or "the tabernacle," or tent, in which the soul resides; which no more involves the

* Luke xx. 38.

† Prov. xiv. 32.

‡ Eccles. xii. 7, iii. 21.

§ Psalm xvi. 11, lxxviii. 26.

|| Luke xii. 4.

¶ Luke xx. 36.

death of the soul, than putting off his clothes involves the death of a man. They speak of "giving up the ghost," or yielding up the spirit; of "the spirits" of wicked men being "in prison," and "the spirits of just men made perfect." There are many passages which more directly prove the immortality of the soul, but they will be mentioned under the next head. God is eternal by an absolute necessity of nature; but man's immortality is of free grace; because he has forfeited his life and being by sin. Nevertheless it must be, as far as we can judge, the immediate act of God to destroy the existence of souls; since they appear to have no internal principle of decay and corruption, and no created power seems able to put an end to their being. But the word of God assures us of their immortality, that they shall live for ever; and therefore, according to the common usage of the word, they may be called eternal. It may not be improper, in this connexion, to remind you, that when the scriptures speak of man's dying like the beasts, having no pre-eminence over them; of there being no wisdom nor knowledge in the grave; of the incapacity of the dead to praise God, and the like, they only refer to the body; its being incapable of action and enjoyment, and having no more concern with the affairs of this world.

2. The state, to which our souls remove at death, is an eternal, unchangeable state. The present state is described in the scriptures as a state of trial: and when the time of human life is ended, the soul of every man is removed to that state for which it was fitted, by the dispositions it contracted, and the manner in which it behaved here. There is no foundation in the word of God for the popish doctrine of purgatory; or a place in which those souls, whose virtues are less perfect than the standard of the Romish church, go through a course of purgation to fit them for heaven; and from this discipline they are released by the prayers and offerings of the living; a notion artfully contrived and adapted to gratify the covetousness and ambition of the Romish priests. The scriptures speak of two states only, a state of happiness and misery; the former to be enjoyed in heaven, the latter to be endured in hell; and each of these states is represented as of eternal duration. It must therefore be of the greatest importance that we seriously consider them in this light.

(1.) The happiness of heaven is eternal; holy souls, when they are taken out of this world, are admitted to paradise; which is undoubtedly a state of glory and happiness, though not equal to that which they shall enjoy after the resurrection. Then they shall be fixed in heaven, in the more immediate presence of God, where there are the brightest displays of his glory, and shall enjoy complete and everlasting happiness.* This state is de-

* Luke xxiii. 43; 2 Cor. xii. 2—5.

scribed in a variety of phrases and figures, in order to give us the most exalted idea of its dignity and felicity; and the principal stress is laid upon this, that it is an eternal state. Thus, we frequently read of "eternal life;" particularly in that gracious promise of our Lord, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." The redemption, which Christ obtained for them that obey him, is called an "eternal redemption;" and that salvation which is in Christ Jesus is said to be "with eternal glory." The house to which good men shall be removed is "eternal in the heavens." The kingdom which they shall possess is an "everlasting kingdom." The crown which shall be given them is an "incorruptible crown, a crown of glory, that fadeth not away." Their future inheritance is "incorruptible and fadeth not away." The bodies of the saints shall be "raised incorruptible," and "this mortal must put on immortality." When the apostle is, in the context, describing that happiness for which their light and short afflictions prepared them, he calls it, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It is said of the heavenly world, that "there shall be no more death;" that there God's "servants shall serve him and reign for ever and ever;" that they shall be made "pillars" there, and "shall go no more out;" and they shall "ever be with the Lord." Further, Christ, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and who lives for evermore, hath assured all his faithful servants, that "because he lives, they shall live also;" their being and happiness shall be secured by him, and be as lasting as his own. And indeed the dispositions and habits which good men contract here, and the religious exercises in which they delight, qualify them for endless happiness. They are capable of relishing the joys of heaven; and as that is a state in which there will be no temptation to sin, but every desirable advantage for improvement in holiness, we may reasonably conclude that they will never forfeit the divine favour; but be making constant improvements. It seems therefore suitable to the holiness and goodness of God, to continue the existence of such pious useful creatures, though his word did not so frequently and clearly assure us that their happiness shall be everlasting. On the other hand,

(2.) The misery of hell is eternal. Those who have lived in rebellion against God and disobedience to the gospel of his Son, and have died impenitent and unrenewed, are removed to a state of misery and torment, in an infernal prison; and at the judgment of the great day, shall be condemned to continue in the same or a worse place for ever. This is the language of the scriptures of truth. Our Lord strongly asserts it; when speaking of hell, he calls it "the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." And this he repeats four times in the following

verses, with a special accent on the duration of it.* His apostles preached the same awful doctrine. St. Paul saith, "They that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction."† St. Jude speaks of the inhabitants of Sodom and the cities about them, as "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."‡ To such passages certain writers have objected, that the words "eternal" and "for ever" sometimes signify a limited duration; or a precise time, whose limits are to us unknown; and therefore they may do so in this case. I allow that in some places, especially in the Old Testament, they must signify a limited duration; therefore the nature of the subjects, concerning which they are used, must be considered; and when they are applied to the human soul, or superior spirits, whose nature is immortal (as is the case in almost every place of the New Testament where the words translated "everlasting," "eternal," and "for ever and ever" occur), they must be taken in their utmost extent. This may be argued from other places, where the eternity of future misery is set forth; and from observing (and it is to be carefully considered) that the same language is used to express the continuance of the happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked. Thus our Lord, having described the solemnities of the future judgment, saith, "These," i. e. the wicked, "shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."§ The original word is the same with regard to the state of both, though our translators have without necessity rendered it differently. There seems no reason, therefore, to believe that the same words, standing in so close a connexion, and applied to the same subject, should express two different ideas, as an everlasting, and a limited duration. This is what I lay the principal stress upon in this argument; and it is confirmed by observing that the apostle John useth the same words to express the punishment of the wicked, as he useth to express the eternity of God, of Christ, and the happiness of the righteous, which all allow to be an endless duration. Thus, speaking of God, he saith, "Who liveth for ever and ever," or to ages of ages. He represents Christ as saying to him, "I am alive for evermore;" and saith, "His servants shall reign for ever and ever." Now he uses the same phrase concerning the misery of the wicked; speaking of the worshippers of the beast and his image, and those who receive his mark, he saith, "The same shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest, day nor night." Again, "The devil, that deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and

* Mark ix. 43—49.

† 2 Thess. i. 9.

‡ Jude 7.

§ Matt. xxv. 46.

the false prophet are, and they shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever."* This is so strong a phrase, that if it does not signify a proper everlasting duration, there is no passage in the scriptures that doth. I must therefore, upon the whole, leave you to judge, whether the New Testament doth not declare, in a variety of the most significant phrases, that the misery of the wicked shall be eternal. Yet if these declarations were not so full and express, it would be difficult to say how it could be otherwise. The souls of men are immortal: they carry out of this world the same dispositions and habits which they contracted here. Now misery is the natural effect and consequence of sin, and their misery must be uninterrupted, because there will be nothing, in that place of torment, to divert the attention of the soul and afford it any ease. A sense of having lost heaven, and that dissatisfaction, vexation, and remorse, which the guilty conscience must feel, would make the soul miserable, wherever it was fixed, and without any positive punishment from the Almighty. And this misery must continue, unless God were to annihilate, or utterly to destroy, the soul, which I see no reason to believe he will. An easy sense of the words, "death," "destruction," and "the second death," may be given without supposing an extinction of being, and very consistent with the many strong expressions of the eternity of future misery. Such words, I apprehend, denote the entire loss and absence of all goodness, ease, happiness, and hope. So, a state of sin and a state of misery are often called "death" and "destruction" in the scriptures.† There is no prospect that this misery will produce amendment, since the fallen angels, who have been many thousand years under the divine displeasure, continue impenitent and obstinate; and (as St. Jude observes) "are reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day."‡ But some have suggested, that "it may be consistent with the faithfulness of God to dispense with his threatenings, and lessen the duration of future misery, though these threatenings seem to refer to an everlasting punishment." But I apprehend, it would be inconsistent with his wisdom, veracity, and faithfulness to remit the penalty, when his threatenings are so express and unconditional, and their time of trial is ended. This opinion is directly confuted by the apostle, who saith, "If we believe not," or are unfaithful, "yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself," by acting contrary to his repeated declarations.§ Besides, this argument supposes

* Compare Rev. iv. 9, 10, v. 14, i. 18, xxii. 5, with xiv. 11, xx. 10.

† Compare Hos. xiii. 1; Rom. vii. 10; Prov. xvii. 19; Eph. ii. 1—5, &c.

‡ Jude 6. The word here rendered "everlasting" is applied to the divine Being by St. Paul, Rom. i. 20, "His eternal power," and has not the same ambiguity as the former word is supposed to have, which is, I think, a confirmation of the argument.

§ 2 Tim. ii. 13.

that some men know more of God's secret purposes than he intended they should, and so reflects highly upon his wisdom and honour. He designed that we should believe he will execute his threatenings, but they have discovered that he will not. The objectors may think themselves wise in making this discovery; yet, as the prophet Isaiah observes, "he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words."* We cannot judge what important ends may be answered with regard to the whole rational creation, by the eternal misery of the damned; who may be very few compared with the great multitude, which no man can number, of God's holy and happy creatures: and therefore we must not take upon us positively to determine, that the duration of their misery cannot be eternal, though the passages in question were more obscure and doubtful than they are. I shall conclude this head in the words of Dr. Lucas, "Methinks, before one should venture on sin, which is threatened with misery; pure, unallayed, complicated, accumulated misery; misery unalterable, incurable, and lasting as long as eternity; it were reasonable to be very sure that the notion of a hell were false, and the doctrine of eternal punishment a mere bugbear. Nay, I protest in a matter of this importance, I think one should scarce trust to a demonstration, unless it had passed the test of the most solid and impartial part of mankind, and stood the shock and trial of many ages."†

I cannot, in this discourse, make so large and particular an application of this weighty subject as it deserves. I shall hereafter urge upon your minds a serious, constant regard to eternity; or, in the language of the apostle, to look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but those which are not seen and eternal. In the mean time, let me exhort and entreat you to reflect upon what has been said, and daily to fix your thoughts upon the wonderful weight and importance of eternity. Think of those two widely different states which I have been describing, and the eternal duration of both. Think of that endless boundless state, to which the souls of men remove; that state which admits of no change, nor pause, nor period for ever. It is eternity, my brethren, it is eternity, that puts weight into unseen things; into the glories and joys of heaven, into the miseries and torments of the damned. Heaven would comparatively be no heaven; and hell, comparatively, no hell, had not each eternity in it. And will you not think of this? Time, with its ever-flowing stream, is bearing you away to the boundless ocean of eternity; and will you not think to which of these states you are going? There is no third. Will you defer the thought till hereafter and say, "Some time hence I will consider it?" Alas, long before that time comes, yea before another sabbath, or another day, you may be in eternity; and then it will be too

* Isaiah xxxi. 2.

† Lucas on Happiness, vol. ii. sect. 2, ch. 3.

late to consider it. You have each of you a soul within you, that will live for ever; that is capable of inconceivable joy or torment; and in the one or the other it must live for ever. Can I possibly say, or you think of, any thing of greater moment? "Oh that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end."*

DISCOURSE II.

2 CORINTHIANS IV. 18.

But the things which are not seen are eternal.

HISTORY relates that when Xerxes, king of Persia, looked round on his vast army, he could not forbear bursting into tears to think, that within less than a hundred years, every one of them would be dead. There his views stopped. But it is much more affecting to a Christian minister, who considers things in the light of the gospel, when he looks round on a numerous congregation, to reflect, that every human creature before him is an immortal creature; and that each of the living who compose that assembly will, in a few years, be not only numbered with the dead, but fixed in an eternal, unalterable state. It must increase the awfulness of the thought, to suppose, that notwithstanding all his care and concern, all the fidelity of his admonitions, and the warmth of his persuasions and entreaties, it is probable that some of them will fall into everlasting destruction. For where is the assembly which consists entirely of those who have passed from death to life, are the children of God and the heirs of heaven? How few appear to act in good earnest for another world! How many seem entirely unconcerned about it! With these affecting thoughts deeply impressed upon my heart, I have lately been discoursing to you, my dear brethren, concerning eternity; and am now to resume the subject, with an humble hope, that, through the divine blessing, it will be effectual to rescue some soul from destruction, and direct it in the way to everlasting life. In the former discourse I attempted to illustrate the general nature of eternity; I then considered it with a particular reference to our souls, and laid before you those evidences of their immortality, which appear to me most satisfactory; and those proofs, with which the scriptures furnish us, of the eternal duration of future happiness and misery. I shall now endeavour to impress these things upon your hearts, and my own, by a suitable application, in the following

* Deut. xxxii. 29.

REFLECTIONS.

1. *How great are our obligations to God and the Redeemer, for discovering eternal things to us, and making provision for our escaping everlasting misery, and obtaining everlasting life.* The future world is an unseen world ; therefore we are prone to forget it, or to be too little impressed with its concerns. To remedy this evil, God hath given us his word, and therein favoured us with a clear account of the nature of our souls, and the eternal state to which they are going. The wisest philosophers amongst the heathen were much in the dark about unseen things. They had strong desires of immortality ; and many of them justly argued the future existence of the soul from such desires ; but they knew little of the length of that existence, or the nature of future bliss and woe. The vulgar were amused with many tales and fables concerning them, dressed up in elegant language by their poets, but only fitted to give them wrong notions of a future state, and had very little tendency to promote the interest of virtue. The ideas which the Jews had of the future state were very obscure ; and there was one sect among them, the Sadducees, who, as St. Luke tells us, asserted, “ that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit,”* in which they fell short of many heathen philosophers. But St. Paul observes, that our Saviour Jesus Christ “ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”† He hath removed the veil that was upon the other world, and thrown a light upon its different regions. We are not left to precarious conjectures, what becomes of the soul, when it leaves the body ; into what state it enters ; and how long it shall endure. We are plainly assured that the soul is immortal, and shall be happy or miserable for ever. This is expressed in language so plain, that a child may understand it ; and yet, as hope and fear are the great springs of the soul, which set it in motion, these awful scenes are described in the most sublime and affecting manner. All the force of language is employed to paint them out, in order to strike our dull minds, and make abiding impressions on our treacherous memories. It is kind and gracious in God to give us so many noble descriptions of the joys of heaven, to allure us to our duty ; so many awful views of the misery of hell, to deter us from sin ; and all prove little enough to answer these important ends. It shows the infinite value of the gospel, and our immense obligations to God for it, that it makes these discoveries ; and which is yet more important, gives us the plainest directions, how we may escape the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life. Though reason is capable of discovering unseen things, yet it could never give us any satisfactory evidence, how the eternal well-being of souls, which had contracted guilt

* Acts xxiii. 8.

† 2 Tim. i. 10.

here, could be secured. Not all the treasures of the world, nor the whole circle of science, could deliver us from the guilt of one sin, free us from one of the Almighty's terrors, or give us one well-grounded hope. "Blessed," for ever blessed, therefore, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again to a lively hope." Let us likewise reflect with fervent gratitude on our obligations to a gracious Redeemer, by whom these important discoveries of a future world are made unto us; and who also gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, the wages of which is death, and to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. How astonishing is that love which disposed him to shed his precious blood for sinners, "that they might not eternally perish, but have everlasting life;" through whom we are "not appointed to wrath, but to obtain eternal salvation!" Think, my fellow-Christians, frequently and seriously think, that Jesus gave his life a ransom for us. By his meritorious sufferings, by his atoning sacrifice, an honourable way is made for our deliverance from the wrath to come; and in consequence of this, the righteous Governor of the world can receive penitent sinners to favour and happiness, without danger of his justice being impeached, or his authority slighted. By the assisting grace and ever prevailing intercession of Christ we hope to obtain the inheritance he hath purchased. It cannot be doubted that he who died for his servants, will conduct them through the dangers and difficulties of life, deliver them from every evil work, and preserve them to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever; and thanks, ardent, everlasting thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

2. *What folly and madness are men chargeable with, for neglecting eternal concerns!* When we observe how men behave, one would imagine they looked upon these things not to be so much as conjectures, but evident falsehoods; and thought they should either die like the brutes, or, if they survived, that God had no wrath for them to fear, and no mercy for them to desire. Look into the conduct of mankind, even of professing Christians, and you will see that visible and temporal things appear to them most weighty; unseen and eternal things, most trifling. They are eagerly solicitous to provide for their frail dying bodies, and to heap up wealth which they cannot carry with them, but take no care, or very little care, of the nobler part of their nature, their never dying souls. They are, every day, laying up for years to come, but take no thought for eternity; though every thing else is busy idleness, laborious sloth, and wretched, mischievous impertinence. They have no notion of the value of time, any further than as their worldly interest depends upon it. They are diligent in trading, but negligent in praying. Their shop books are duly posted, and their accounts with men stated and balanced; but they seldom consult the book of God, in

order to know what they must do to escape eternal wrath ; and have never inquired how accounts stand between God and their immortal souls. Yea, some who have lived sixty and seventy years, and know that eternity cannot be far off, have, it is to be feared, never in their whole lives, spent one serious hour in inquiring into the nature and state of their souls, and what preparation is necessary for eternity. There are other persons, less busy about temporal concerns, but equally slothful and careless about eternal ones. They waste that precious time in unnecessary sleep, or recreation, which was given them to improve for eternity. They contrive a thousand methods to kill time, and are thankful to any one for an expedient to pass it off. They waste those hours in public houses, clubs, and gay assemblies, in gaming and amusement, which should be employed in studying their bibles, in the devotions of the family and closet, and in doing good to mankind. They waste God's sacred time, as well as their own ; and will not devote even the short interval of a sabbath to secure their eternal happiness. Such is the state of the generality of mankind. They go on in their business or their diversions without any seeming concern. They lie down and rise upon the brink of hell, and yet are secure and fearless. "The life everlasting" is indeed an article of their creed, which they often repeat, and even in the immediate presence of God. They hear of an eternal heaven and hell every sabbath, when they can find time for public worship ; yet continue as unmoved as if it was nothing to them. Sometimes, if you address them very seriously on these weighty subjects, they stare and seem astonished ; perhaps they are a little alarmed, and begin to think there is something in them. But when the sermon is done, or the friendly monitor retired, they return to their negligence and folly again. Thus wretchedly does the deceitfulness of sin harden men's hearts. They seem to be proof against the terrors of the Lord and the grace of the gospel. The blood of Christ shed for souls, the strivings of the Spirit with them, the warnings of conscience, the admonition of friends, the addresses and prayers of ministers, have no abiding effect on their stupid, senseless spirits. They forget that while they trifle, time passeth on ; and while they slumber, their damnation slumbereth not. Thus they go on, in a round of folly and impertinence, till their foot slippeth in some dreadful moment, and they are lost for ever. And now what can we say to these things, but take up the mournful lamentations of Solomon, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil ; and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead?"* Eternity ! little do careless souls think how much is contained in that one awful word. May the Lord forgive us, that we see so much of this folly and madness, and no more

* Eccl. ix. 3.

lament it ! That we do not more tenderly pity perishing souls, and more earnestly pray for them ! To see men wilfully throwing away their souls for a thing of nought, and acting as if every thing was important but eternity, what more affecting, melting sight can there be to a pious mind ? Let us, with real Christian compassion, be frequently offering up such petitions as these, for those unhappy creatures ; O thou who formedst souls with a capacity to know, and love, and enjoy thee for ever ; and, out of thy boundless compassion, hast sent thy dear Son to seek and save them ; to inform them of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell ; pity these wretched souls which do not pity themselves. Let mercy interpose between them and everlasting ruin. Awaken them out of their pleasant slumber, though it be on the brink of damnation, lest they perish for ever and there be none to deliver them. Are the things which are not seen eternal ? let us reflect,

3. *How serious should ministers and parents be, in addressing the souls committed to their charge.* Bear with me, my Christian friends, while, with eternity in my view, I solemnly admonish myself and you. It is an awful idea, which the apostle gives us of the ministerial office, when he saith, "They watch for your souls, as they that must give account."* It is for souls, precious, dear-bought, everlasting souls, they watch ; and they must give account to God of their integrity and zeal in their work. How diligent and laborious should ministers therefore be, in studying the gospel of Christ, which contains the rule of duty, the terms of acceptance, and the sanctions of the divine law : that they may be able to inform the ignorant, direct awakened sinners what they must do to be saved, and encourage any serious impressions which may appear. How careful ought they to be, to consider their hearers as immortal creatures ; and not spend their sacred hours in entertaining them with dry witticisms, abstruse speculations, or curious reflections, which may tickle the ear, please the fancy, and gain the applause of the undiscerning, but leave their hearts entirely untouched. How faithful should they be in reproving those vices against which the eternal wrath of God is denounced, and cautioning against those indulgences by which unstable souls are beguiled, the horror of sin taken off, and the dread of wrath to come lessened. With what ardent, active compassion should they address the consciences of men ; trying every awful representation, every tender and pathetic remonstrance, to make them thoughtful and religious. How solicitous should they be to set the terrors of the Lord in array before them ; to frighten them, if possible, out of their indolence, and make them anxious to know "what they shall do to inherit eternal life." Unmoved by the folly and uncharitableness of those who may style them severe and merci-

* Heb. xiii. 17.

less preachers, for so doing, let them imitate the example of Christ and his holy apostles, who displayed the wrath to come in all its terrors: remembering this, that, however man may censure them now, it will appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, that they were more merciful and compassionate to souls than those who prophesy smooth things, and “suffer sin” upon their fellow-immortals.* How careful should ministers be to address their hearers in a way that they can understand and feel; sensible that the meanest of them has an immortal soul that must be saved or damned for ever; and that there is little prospect of success without addressing to men’s hopes and fears: according to the observation of a lively author, that “all such writings and discourses that touch no man, will mend no man.”† Were ministers to recollect, when they appear in the pulpit, that it is possible some one, at least, of their hearers, may be attending their last sermon, joining in their last public prayer, spending their last sabbath on earth; and, before the next, may be in endless joy or endless woe, what a wonderful efficacy would this have, to make them preach and pray like men in earnest; not like men acting a part, or going over a round of services for pay; but as those who know and remember that they and their hearers are hastening to an awful account, before him who shall judge the living and the dead. Allow us therefore, brethren, to deal plainly and faithfully with you; for your eternal interest is at stake. We could, perhaps, entertain you with some speculative niceties, or curious inquiries; and this with less study and labour than is requisite to form such discourses as the meanest capacity may understand, and by which dull minds may be awakened and affected. But were we in this instance to consult our own ease and vanity, and your amusement, it would be cruelty to your souls. Some of you might censure and reproach us for it to all eternity, and your blood may be required at our hand.‡ May God awaken all his ministers to be duly sensible of the worth of their own souls, and to remember that their own eternal interest, as well as that of their hearers, is concerned in the work in which they are engaged; and then they will be indolent and trifle no more. What hath been already said under this head, ought to come with great weight on the minds of Christian parents. Your children, sirs, are creatures formed for eternity. They have never-dying souls; and these souls are committed to your charge. An awful trust, for which you must give a strict account! Have you no concern, but about their bodies; to feed and clothe them and put them into a way to support themselves in the world? You do almost as much as this for your horses and dogs. Is it enough, think ye, to teach them polite accomplishments and to get fortunes for them? I

* Lev. xix. 17.

† Mr. Pope.

‡ Ezek. iii. 18.

hope you think this is not enough. You teach your children the principles of religion : it is well. But do they not see in you too much eagerness about the world, and fondness for dress and pleasures ? and do you not encourage these dispositions in them ? and thus your behaviour directly contradicts the maxims of the gospel, which you teach them ; and, in effect, undoes all your instructions. Let me direct you to inquire, as in the sight of God, with what seriousness you teach your children, and with what earnestness you pray for them. If you never talk to them about their souls and eternal concerns ; or never appear deeply affected, when you are speaking of them, how can your children believe that they are important, or that you think them so ? If you never pray with them alone, nor in your families ; or only in a cold, formal, lifeless manner, how is it likely that God should hear your prayers, or your children be the better for them ? If they see you much elated with worldly success, and much dejected at worldly losses ; if they see you very diligent and anxious about seen and temporal things, but showing no concern and zeal about unseen and eternal things ; what good can you expect from them ? My brethren, the plain question is this, have your children immortal souls, or have they not ? If they have, it undoubtedly ought to be your first, your chief care to correct those ill habits and passions which would make them fuel for eternal fire ; and to cultivate and encourage those good dispositions and qualities which will be the seed of eternal life. Remember that your children may soon die, and be out of the reach of your instructions and prayers ; and if they perish through your neglect, God will require their blood at your hand. I hope you pity and pray for your ministers under the weight of so awful a thought. They are obliged to you for your pity and prayers ; and they can make you no better return than to urge and beseech you to pity yourselves, and to pity your children ; and to pray for you, that God would excite you, by his Spirit, to a pious care of them, and assist and succeed you in it. Let me add, that masters and mistresses should be tenderly concerned for the eternal welfare of their servants. Allow them, my dear friends, time to prepare for eternity ; especially to attend public worship, both parts of every Lord's day if possible ; as they have few other advantages. Compassionately reprove what is amiss in them. Direct and encourage them to be serious and good. Put bibles, and plain practical treatises, into their hands ; and let them learn from your instructions, examples, and prayers, what they must do to be saved. The soul of the meanest is unspeakably precious. For the souls of the poorest, Christ shed his blood. There is no distinction between masters and servants in the world of spirits : and to that eternal world you and they are hastening ; and must quickly stand together before the tribunal of your common Master, with whom

there is no respect of persons. Since "the things that are not seen are eternal,"

4. *What an awful thing is it to die, and enter upon an eternal state!* One of the fathers, with great beauty and propriety, calls death "the gate of eternity." The death of a human creature is his passing out of time into eternity; and what can be a more solemn thing? The death of our fellow-creatures around us is so common, that we seldom make any serious reflections upon it. Persons often talk of it with as much indifference as of any common article of news; "and read a play bill and a bill of mortality with much the same sensations."* Thus, as the psalmist observes, "like sheep men are laid in the grave."† Survivors, like sheep, when one is taken away to be slaughtered, are for awhile alarmed and terrified; but, like them, they soon return to their food or diversion, forget those that are gone, and do not improve their removal. With regard to the circumstances of death, there is generally one event to the righteous and the wicked; but oh, what a vast inconceivable difference immediately succeeds it; with regard to each their time of trial is ended, and their eternal state commences. The righteous man putteth off the body with all its cares, temptations, and sorrows; his soul ascends to God, and enters upon everlasting rest, security, and joy. It passeth to a world, where all its faculties shall be enlarged; where it shall be conformed to the image of God in holiness, and be perfectly and unalterably happy. What a glorious and delightful change to a good man! The sinner likewise changes a temporal for an eternal state; but it is a state of misery. "When a wicked man dieth," saith Solomon, "his expectation shall perish, and the hope of unjust men perisheth."‡ His last breath and his last hope expire together. He shall never hear preaching or praying any more; never receive one other invitation of grace, or offer of mercy. When a wicked man dieth, he leaves temporal things, which were his portion and happiness, behind him. He is brought into desolation as in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrors. He goes to the bar of God to give an account of the time, the means, and advantages he hath enjoyed, and to receive his doom. The soul, which hath been, through life, asleep in sin, will awake to full vigour in another world; awake to behold its own guilt and wretchedness, as soon as it quits the body. The soul will then be all sight, all sense, all ear; and its immortality, which is now its dignity and privilege above the brutes, will be its everlasting misery and torment. This is the portion of a wicked man. And is it not then an awful thing to die? You will think so, when the king of terrors seizes you. A man of humour, in his gay hours, wrote and published a history of those who had died jesting; but he solemnly retracted it in writing on his death-

* Dr. Young.

† Psalm xlix. 14.

‡ Prov. xi. 7.

bed ; for he found that death was no jesting matter.* To see an immortal creature dying with a jest upon his tongue, or in a stupid thoughtless manner, or even without any well-grounded hope, is surely the saddest spectacle in the world. To think of his removal to everlasting punishment, is surely the most affecting thought that can enter into the human mind. " Ah ! eternity ! eternity !" said a graceless wretch once, dying and looking dismally at those about him ; and there he stopped ; he said no more ; more he could not say ; more he need not say. Ponder upon this example, and, if you dread such a death, do not lead such a life. When we consider that death is the gate of eternity, what a solemn thing is the death of a single person. But how deeply must every serious mind be affected, to hear of hundreds, and sometimes thousands, being hurried into eternity at once, by the devouring sword, by a shipwreck, or an earthquake. Is death the gate of eternity ! What a horrible thing is self-murder ! And how little do they think of an hereafter, who madly rush out of the world, in defiance of the authority and appointment of the Almighty, and plunge themselves into everlasting destruction to escape temporary poverty, pain, or shame ? How much reason have they, who are yet in their sins, to adore the divine long-suffering and patience, to which it is owing, that they have not been long ago cut off, and consigned to the regions of everlasting darkness and despair. And what a powerful motive should this consideration be to us all, to be serious and thoughtful, sober and diligent, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord ; since eternity is just before us. Let us, my friends, often think what it is to die, and to what a world and state the departed soul immediately goes. It is an eternal, unalterable state. It goes to one of those two awful regions, where the love of God appears in its brightest glories, or his vengeance in inconceivable horrors. Think of this, when you hear of the death of others. How natural and useful a reflection would this be. They are gone into eternity ! When you hear the solemn sound of a tolling bell, think, There is some other soul gone into eternity. When you attend or see the funeral of a relation, neighbour, or acquaintance, think, His time is ended ; he is gone to his eternal home, and fixed in an unchangeable state. Such thoughts and reflections as these, none but fools will endeavour to banish from their minds ; and none will sneer him who expresseth them, but men of the world, who have their portion in this life. Such thoughts are perfectly reasonable, highly becoming mortal creatures, and, being of very great advantage, should always be recollected on these occasions. I would particularly inculcate them upon those persons, who are most in danger of forgetting them ; I mean those who, by their professions and employments, are often witnesses of the last scenes of departing mortals, or assist

* M. Deslandes.

at the burial of the dead. Their familiarity with sickness and death is very apt to harden their minds against such serious impressions. This is generally the case with nurses, undertakers, and sextons; and I fear it is often the case with persons of a better education, and understanding; even apothecaries, physicians, and, may I not add, divines. To such persons I beg leave to address what Mr. Halyburton, a celebrated minister and professor in Scotland, said to a young apothecary, who attended him when he lay on his death-bed; "Sir, I give you solemn warning, that if you become hardened by the frequent sight of sick and dying persons, you will be in danger of losing all sensibility of conscience, and being hardened for ever." "Man giveth up the ghost," saith Job, "and where is he?"* intimating thereby, that a dying creature is an object of very serious reflection. What is become of him or her, whom, but a few days ago, we saw and conversed with? To what place, to what company, are they gone? Oh, what do they see and feel and think now? And how soon will the question be asked concerning me also, Where is he? Oh, that solemn awful day, which finishes my course, and puts an end to all the labours of my hand and tongue! that day, after which you will see my face and hear my voice no more! that infinitely important day, when I must enter upon eternity! "Eternity! thou pleasing, dreadful thought!" Is death just before me, and the unseen world and eternity following after it? Gather not my soul with sinners, O Lord, but grant that I may find mercy of the Lord in that day. I shall conclude this discourse with the following passage; which cannot, I think, fail of some effect on all that hear it attentively. Secretary Walsingham, an eminent courtier and statesman in Queen Elizabeth's time, in his old age retired into privacy in the country. Some of his former gay companions came to see him, and told him he was melancholy; "No," saith he, "I am not melancholy; I am serious; and it is fit I should be so. Ah! my friends! while we laugh, all things are serious round about us! God is serious who exerciseth patience towards us; Christ is serious, who shed his blood for us; the Holy Spirit is serious in striving against the obstinacy of our hearts; the holy scriptures bring to our ears the most serious things in the world; the holy sacraments represent the most serious and awful matters; the whole creation is serious in serving God and us; all that are in heaven and hell are serious; how then can we be gay?"

* Job xiv. 10.

DISCOURSE III.

2 CORINTHIANS IV. 18.

But the things which are not seen are eternal.

IT is the observation of a pious writer, that "eternity so often passeth over our lips, that it forgets its way to our hearts."* We are so accustomed to the sound of the word, that the thing loses its awful efficacy upon our minds. Against this, brethren, we must guard with the utmost solicitude. Let me, therefore, once more engage your diligent attention to a discourse on eternity. As God has graciously lengthened out my time to speak to you again, and yours to hear, I can speak and you hear of nothing which is of greater moment and importance than eternity. I am the more willing to dwell upon the subject, from a full persuasion that "a man must be perfectly good, or desperately abandoned, or impenetrably stupid, that is not alarmed at a full, serious, and weighty consideration of eternity, an eternity of happiness or misery; when, for aught he knows, he may stand just on the brink of it."† Perhaps I may never speak nor you hear of it again upon earth; let us therefore be serious.

I have already considered the general nature of eternity; illustrated and proved the immortality of the soul, and the eternal duration of those states of happiness and misery, to one or other of which every human soul is removed at death. I then represented to you the great obligations we are under to God and the Redeemer for discovering to us eternal things, and making provision for our escaping everlasting misery. I took up a lamentation over the folly and madness of mankind in neglecting eternal concerns. I urged upon you, who are heads of families, and upon myself, the most earnest concern for the salvation of the immortal souls committed to our charge; and I exhorted you frequently to reflect what an awful thing it is to die, and enter upon an eternal state. I have one reflection more to make from this subject, concerning a duty which I design more largely to consider and enforce; namely,

5. *How much is it our duty and interest to look at unseen and eternal things!* or to eye and regard eternity in all we do. And in discussing this point, I shall consider, what looking at eternal things includes; and then propose some arguments and motives to engage you more stedfastly to regard them.

1. I am to consider what looking at eternal things includes. And that is, a firm belief of their reality; a serious consideration of their importance; and steady aims and pursuits agreeable thereto.

(1.) Looking at eternal things implies a firm belief of their reality; that we have immortal spirits with us, and that there is an

* Dr. Young.

† Seed's Sermons, vol. i. serm. 1.

eternal state and world just before us. These are unseen things, and therefore the eye of the mind is to be directed to them. Faith is, as it were, that eye; for we walk by faith, not by sight: and faith is described by the apostle as "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence," or full conviction, "of things not seen."* Faith assents to what reason and revelation discover concerning them. The Christian professeth to believe what the scriptures reveal concerning these important things; and is as sure of their reality, as of the reality of any material object which is seen by his bodily eyes. The Christian endeavours to have this faith strengthened by reasoning about unseen things, by frequently examining the account which the word of God gives of them, and meditating upon it. Further, looking at them includes,

(2.) A serious consideration of their importance. The word here translated "look at," is in other places rendered, "take heed, consider, mark, or observe attentively;" and signifies serious, fixed, repeated consideration.† We are not merely to take a transient glance of eternal things, now and then; but to look at them with a fixed and stedfast eye, or dwell upon them by close meditation; to bend all the powers of the mind to study them, as subjects of the utmost importance. This includes comparing things temporary and eternal, for so it appears from the context the apostle did; considering the respective value and moment of each; paying no greater regard to seen things than their fading, unsatisfying nature deserves; taking the eye of the soul off from them, and fixing it upon unseen things. It intimates further, that this serious consideration of their nature is frequent, and our regard to them habitual. Looking at them is, as far as possible, the continued act of the soul, its daily employment; and to them the thoughts must be habitually directed. Once more, looking at unseen things includes,

(3.) A steady aim and diligent pursuit, agreeable to their nature and importance; or, a diligent incessant care to escape eternal misery and secure eternal happiness. The word "look at" signifies also to "aim at" or "pursue." It conveys this idea in the verse where our text is; and in that exhortation of the same apostle, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."‡ From this word our English word *scope* is derived, which signifies the chief design a man has in view, the mark he aims at, the end he is pursuing. This may be illustrated by those words of the same apostle, "I press toward the mark;" I vigorously pursue the object I have my eye upon, "for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," even the eternal inheritance.§ This, then, is our great duty as Christians, daily and seriously to consider eternal things,

* Heb. xi. 1. † Compare Luke xi. 35; Rom. xvi. 17; Gal. vi. 1; Phil. iii. 17.

‡ Phil. ii. 4.

§ Phil. iii. 14.

and use our utmost endeavours to escape the wrath to come, and obtain everlasting life. We are to consider the whole of our duration, and what is best for us upon the whole ; what regard is due to temporal, and what to eternal things. Let us then maintain a stedfast, fixed regard to eternity, wherever we are, and whatever we do. Were we deliberately to think upon temporal and eternal things, we could never imagine that provision for the present life was worthy so many hours' thought and labour every day, and eternity scarce worthy of half a thought in many hours ; and perhaps not one fixed serious thought in many days. Where one thought is spent upon that question, What shall we eat and drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed ; how shall we get money or enjoy pleasure ? there would be a thousand spent upon that question, What must I do to be saved ? Did we seriously consider but a thousandth part of the joys of an eternal heaven, and the horrors of an eternal hell, we should never be easy till our everlasting interest was secure. Let the thoughts of eternity, therefore, be made familiar to our minds. Let us endeavour to mingle them with all our employments and enjoyments ; and especially with all the exercises of religion, both public and private. To excite you to this, I am

2. To propose some motives and arguments. And that you may be engaged to regard eternity in all you do, consider that life, time, and means are given us to prepare for eternity ; that we must very quickly enter upon it ; that, as our character is when our time ends, so will our eternal state be ; and that many present advantages will attend our looking at eternal things, which will likewise have a great influence upon our eternal state. Consider,

(1.) Life, and time, and means are given us, that we may prepare for eternity. A work of the greatest importance that can employ our hands, or enter into our thoughts ! When God formed us at first he designed us for an everlasting existence. Did he make us a little lower than the angels, higher than the brutes, and crown us with glory and honour, merely that we might look at temporal things ? Surely he made us these souls for nobler ends, higher employments, and weightier concerns, than what relate to this world. And shall we degrade these rational, immortal natures now, and sink them into endless misery hereafter, by employing them only about the concerns of this world ? Further, God has given us our time to prepare for eternity. Now is the accepted time, the day of grace, when pardon and salvation may be obtained. He has lengthened out our period of trial, often raised us up from the brink of the grave, and preserved us from fatal accidents, and all that he might give us a little more time to regard eternal things. And shall it all be spent about those that are temporal ? Were we

truly sensible of the worth of our immortal souls, we should be more sensible of the worth of time, and those seasons which God hath given us to train up our souls for a blessed immortality. For the same end he has given us a variety of means and privileges. He hath sent his Son to discover immortality, and to open the kingdom of heaven for us. He hath sent down his Spirit to enlighten our understandings; to strive with and rouse our dull and stupid souls; to convince us of sin, of righteousness, and of eternal judgment. He hath given us his word to be our guide to everlasting glory. He hath commissioned ministers to explain and enforce his word, to beseech men to be reconciled to God, and secure eternal life. We have all of us enjoyed several hundred sabbaths, some of us several thousand, on each of which we have heard or read something that had a tendency to direct our thoughts to eternity. Consider how many discourses your ministers have taken pains to compose and deliver, with a sincere concern to promote your everlasting salvation. Add to these the many admonitions of your parents and friends; the many checks of conscience which you have felt; the many intimations which that inward monitor has given you, that you were designed for eternity, and ought to make diligent preparation for it. All these means are the gifts of God; they all centre in this grand design, to lead your thoughts to futurity; and are all kindly intended to save you from everlasting ruin. Consider,

(2.) We must quickly go out of time into eternity. It was an awful vision which St. John saw, of an angel standing upon the sea and upon the earth, who "lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him who created all things, and liveth for ever and ever, that there shall be time no longer."* Soon will these solemn words be uttered concerning you and me, that our time shall be no longer. The imagination of men placeth eternity at a distance, and therefore they forget it. They are convinced of the necessity of preparing for eternity; they are perhaps determined some time hence to set about it; but this secret thought is at the bottom of all their neglect and trifling, that they are not likely to die soon. Thus, as the prophet expresseth it, "they put far away the evil day,"† and therefore indulge themselves in oppression and luxury. So the wicked servant in our Lord's parable said, "My master delayeth his coming," and therefore he "began to beat his fellow-servants, and eat and drink with the drunken." They think the next summons will not be sent to them. But to depend upon this, in an affair of such moment, is certainly the utmost folly. Many who argued in this absurd way are long since in eternity; and are now bewailing, and for ever will bewail, their mad delay. We have the same frail bodies, and are liable to

* Rev. x. 5, 6.

† Amos vi. 3.

the same diseases or accidents which hurried them out of time, and broke off all the wise purposes of their hearts. A man that holds his life by so uncertain a tenure, can never be said to be out of danger. He that is in time to-day may be in eternity to-morrow. There is but a single puff of breath between us and heaven or hell. Everlasting things hang upon the slender thread of human life; and when the summons cometh, prepared or unprepared, you must go. Consider, then, ye that are entirely taken up with temporal things, "that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."* And will you not, then, look at eternal things? Consider further,

(3.) As our character is when our time ends, so will our eternal state be. An eternal heaven or hell depends upon your good or ill behaviour in this short state of trial. While you are here there is hope that some serious impressions may fix upon your minds, and your souls may be awakened to regard eternal things. But, at death, hope is for ever gone. The season of grace is over. The sinner has no more time for prayer, reading, or serving God or man. It is then too late to rectify past mistakes, to subdue sinful habits, and obtain the favour of heaven. Time will never come again. Yesterday will return no more. A man may recover his health and estate, but may never recover his time. When once the soul is removed into eternity, the dispositions and habits which it carried thither with it will continue, and be a source of everlasting joy or sorrow. Between the vast eternal regions "there is a great gulf fixed," and no soul will ever be permitted to pass from the one to the other. In the present state our lives are chequered; there is an alternative of pleasure and pain; or they are mixed and blended together. But in eternity there is no mixture or alternative; it is all pleasure or all pain. This difference between the present and future state increases the importance of what I am urging. From hence it appears, that, properly speaking, there is no such thing as a trifle upon earth; every thing is weighty; each action, word, and thought, is weighty; because each has an everlasting effect, has some influence on our eternal state. Those who now deride serious godliness, as strict and precise, and think that ministers make too much ado about it, will then be of another mind. When they see that men's characters determine their future state, they will think that all was comparatively too much that was employed about temporal things, and all too little that was employed about eternal ones. Consider once more,

* James iv. 13, 14.

(4.) Many present and great advantages will attend our looking at eternal things ; advantages which will have a powerful effect upon our present temper and character, and consequently on our eternal state ; and they are these. Looking at and regarding eternity will restrain our fondness for the world ; increase our hatred of sin and love to God and the Redeemer : it will make us careful to redeem our time ; promote our patience under afflictions ; make us serious and lively in all the duties of religion ; dispose us to do good to others ; and make us willing to die. Let me just touch upon each of these thoughts.

(a) Looking at eternal things will restrain your fondness for the world, its riches, honour, and pleasures ; for it will show you that they are all temporary, fading, and deceitful. This will teach you to follow your worldly business with moderation ; sensible that you have more important business to mind. It will abate your love of money and eagerness to gain it. You will not be elated with the possessions and enjoyments of life, which you must leave all behind you ; which in themselves will be of no avail to your eternal happiness, but on the contrary render it extremely hazardous. It will abate your fondness for the honours and applause of the world, and all those marks of distinction and pre-eminence, after which little minds are so eager. In this view, when a new pope is installed, an officer is appointed to approach him and say, "Holy father, think of the days of eternity." The honours of this world cannot silence a clamorous conscience, or avert or suspend the possessor's eternal doom. A great man of a neighbouring country had an extraordinary mark of distinction and honour sent him by his prince, as he lay on his death-bed. "Alas !" says he, looking coldly upon it, "this is a mighty fine thing here in this country ; but I am just going to a country where it will be of no service to me." So trifling will all the honours of earth appear to the man who has eternity in his eye ! In like manner it will restrain your fondness for the diversions and amusements of life. You will relish, yea will need, very few of them. You will have better things to mind ; nobler objects to pursue, and taste pleasures in the pursuit which will be rational, manly, refined ; which will improve upon reflection, and last for ever. A lady of this nation, having spent the afternoon and evening at cards and in gay company, when she came home, found her servant maid reading a pious book. She looked over her shoulder and said, "Poor melancholy soul ! what pleasure canst thou find in poring so long upon that book ?" That night the lady could not sleep, but lay sighing and weeping very much. Her servant asked her, once and again, what was the matter. At length she burst into a flood of tears, and said, "Oh ! it was one word I saw in your book that troubles me ; there I saw that word *eternity*. Oh ! how happy should I be, if I were prepared for *eternity* !" The consequence of this impression was that she laid aside

her cards, forsook her gay company, and set herself seriously to prepare for another world. The thoughts of eternity would lead us cheerfully to sacrifice any temporal gain, honour, or pleasure, to the welfare of the never-dying soul. Again,

(b) Looking at eternal things will increase our hatred of sin. This evil thing threw the angels out of heaven; it degrades the human soul; defaces the image of God upon it; deprives it of eternal bliss, and plunges it into everlasting torments. Did you eye eternity, you would never hearken to the counsels of the wicked, nor comply with other temptations to sin. You would at once recollect, that though sin may appear pleasant, its pleasures are but for a season, and its wages is eternal death. You would be resolute in denying worldly lusts, crucifying the flesh, and laying aside the sin which easily besets you, though it be as difficult and painful as cutting off a right hand or plucking out an eye; considering that it is better to enter into life halt, or maimed, or blind, than having two eyes or hands to be cast into everlasting fire.* One serious thought of eternity would banish those vain excuses, which we are apt to make for conformity to the world, and venturing on the appearance of evil.

(c) This would increase our love to God and the Redeemer. It would excite and cherish the most grateful and affectionate emotions in our hearts towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father, who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace; and in proportion to the solidity and liveliness of our hope, it would fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Again,

(d) Looking at eternal things would make us very careful to redeem our time. We should then see that time is inestimably precious; beyond the price of silver and gold, of pearls and jewels. It would humble us before God, that so much has been mispent already, and awaken us to seize and improve every moment for God and eternity. Further,

(e) It would promote our patience under afflictions, and reconcile us to those we feel or see. It was St. Paul's regard to eternal things, which kept him from fainting under his grievous sufferings, as he observes in the verses before the text. Such a consideration of futurity would tend to reconcile our minds to the unequal distributions of Providence, and those indignities and pains which some of the best men suffer, and some of the worst escape. Carry your thoughts into eternity, and you will see these seeming disorders rectified, and the wisdom and goodness of God appearing most illustrious. You will see the prosperous sinner lamenting his prosperity, and the afflicted saint praising God for his afflictions. And indeed, it is comparatively a little matter to an immortal being, whether he suffers affliction or enjoys prosperity, during the few years he spends on earth. To a soul that eyes eternity, his afflictions

* Matt. xviii. 8.

will appear mereies, as being intended to makes his heart better, to preserve him from everlasting pain, and make him meet for everlasting pleasure. The thought of eternity has reconciled many pious persons to very heavy sorrows. That divine man Mr. Philip Henry, when he felt the most acute pain from a complicated fit of the stone and colic, said, "I am tormented, but blessed be God, not 'in this flame.' I am on fire; but blessed be God, it is not the fire of hell." Another pious minister after he had uttered many doleful groans, through the agony of his pain from the stone, said to his friends, "Well! for all this roaring and groaning, I would not, for ten thousand worlds, change conditions with the healthiest, richest man upon earth, who is enslaved to sin and going down to hell." A wise man would bear any bodily pain to escape everlasting pain, and suffer any temporal loss, rather than lose his soul. No man can endure such heavy afflictions on earth but eternal happiness will amply compensate them. Further,

(f) Regarding eternity would make us serious and lively in all the duties of religion. A celebrated painter among the ancients, being asked why he took so much pains about some pieces he had in hand, answered, "I am painting for eternity." Did men consider that they are working for eternity in every thing they do of the religious kind, it would put life and vigour into all their actions. Did they reflect, that in their prayers, they are asking the eternal life of their souls, they would pray with greater attention, seriousness, and fervour than, it is to be feared, they generally do. No formal, lifeless petitions would proceed from their lips, but their hearts would be engaged as well as their tongues. Under the influence of this thought, what serious devout worshippers would they be in the house of God! We should not see them habitually coming in after the service of it is begun, or perhaps half done; they would not behave irreverently there, or appear inattentive to what is said. They would not allow themselves to sleep, when they should be hearing the words of eternal life; nor would they neglect any opportunity of improving their hearts by religious worship. They would not go away, as they too often do, without any self-reflection, or considering how much they were concerned in what they had been hearing; since by the word of God their characters are soon to be tried, and their eternal state unalterably fixed. Were you, my brethren, to regard eternity, you would every day closely examine the state of your souls, and watch their secret workings and desires. You would be active in all your endeavours to serve God, and grow in grace; and would never be satisfied with any cold doubtful hope, when eternity was in question. Were Christians to think, and speak, and act under a deep impression of eternity, there would be no trifling with God, and conscience, and sacred things. Their great ambition would be

to please God, and their chief aim to save their souls, and faithfully to improve all the helps they have for that purpose.

(g) Looking at eternal things would dispose and quicken us to do all the good we could to the souls of others. It would lead us to pity perishing souls, and be active in our attempts to save them. It would make us tenderly solicitous to try every method to reach their hearts; yea, to "save them with fear, pulling them as out of the fire."* We should be earnest in our prayers to God for them, and unwearied in our endeavours to preserve them from everlasting ruin. In order to this, we should be often dropping a hint concerning eternity; since, if any thing will awaken a man to be serious and thoughtful, that will. We should exhort and admonish one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and so be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy. I add, once more,

(h) Habitual regards to eternity would make us willing to die.

Death and eternity are awful scenes; they strike the mind with horror. The soul shrinks at the thought of removing to an unseen and eternal state. But familiarity with these scenes, if attended with serious reflections upon them, will gradually abate their terror; as it will promote those dispositions in the heart which are a good preparative for entering upon them. We shall then be sensible that it is a matter of very little importance when, and where, and how a person dies; the great thing is, to what state death removes him. This would excite us to apply our hearts unto wisdom; to labour and pray for brighter evidences and firmer hopes of possessing eternal rest; and as these were obtained, our fears of death would abate. We should no longer shudder on the brink of eternity, but cheerfully resign our souls into his hands, who died to redeem them; who has engaged to keep that which is committed to him against that day, and who has the keys of death and the unseen world.

These, my brethren, are some of the great advantages of looking at unseen and eternal things. And oh, that these motives may engage you to direct your eyes to them; to entertain some serious thoughts of eternity every day, and lie down every night with an impression of it upon your spirits! May they lead you to recollect, wherever you go, and whatever you are doing, that you are on the brink of an awful eternity! You may perhaps object, that it is a gloomy subject, and will spoil your pleasures. But here you mistake. It will spoil your sinful and dangerous pleasures; and so I would have it: but it will spoil no innocent, rational, solid pleasures. It is astonishing how any man can be cheerful, who neglects the interest of his soul and forgets eternity. "Delight is not seemly for a fool;"† and no fool so great

* Jude 23.

† Prov. xix. 10.

as he. True joy does not belong to him. He has no title to it, no relish for it. True pleasure is a serious thing. Though the ways, in which I would persuade you to walk, may at first appear gloomy, they will brighten as you proceed ; you will soon find that they are ways of pleasantness and paths of peace ; and will at length undoubtedly concur in this sentiment, that “ since all other possessions and attainments are vain and perishable, the only true wisdom is to meditate upon eternity, and the best philosophy is to be a good man.”*

And now, my friends, I have finished what I intended on this weighty and most interesting subject : and I do earnestly entreat you to take a serious and careful review of it, and ask yourselves, O my soul, art thou prepared for eternity ? And yet I fear, after all that you have heard upon the subject, some of you continue unaffected and unimpressed with it ; that you will go on in your accustomed round of business and amusement, without considering the eternal world, on the borders of which you stand, and into which you may, in an instant, be hurried. Nay, I cannot but fear that some of you may have so little regarded what has been said, as to go immediately from hence to some place of public resort, to your walks, or your visits, as if you studied to drive away all serious thought ; and may to-morrow have forgotten even the subject upon which I have been addressing you. But I must again warn you, that eternity is at hand, whether you regard it or no. I am unwilling to conclude till I have some hope that you will prepare for eternity ; at least will consider it. Let me therefore beg one favour of every one of you, young and old, rich and poor ; and it is but a small favour I ask : it is this, that you would every one retire, and spend a little time this evening in thinking upon eternity. Ponder in your minds, what it is to live for ever, in a state of endless happiness or endless misery. If you will do this, I shall have a cheerful hope, that one quarter of an hour so spent, will be the most profitable you ever spent in your lives ; and that God will make the meditation profitable to your souls, and the beginning of eternal felicity. But if you will not do this much, in an affair of such vast moment, I can say nothing that will awaken and impress you. Thou, O my God, art witness, and all ye that fear God are witnesses, that I have given thoughtless, dying creatures plain and faithful warning of the nature and approach of eternity ; and your own consciences, O careless, stupid mortals, witness for me in the day of eternal judgment, that you were forewarned. You will then recollect that you were again and again addressed upon this subject ; you will desire to forget it then, but will not be able. May the Spirit of God, for whom nothing is too hard, so impress these things upon your hearts

* Rapin's Critical Works, vol. ii. p. 509.

now, that the recollection of them then may be joyful and not tormenting to you.

I have a cheerful persuasion, that some of you, brethren, are impressed with these representations, and will apply your minds more closely than before, to the great concerns of eternity; that you will daily keep all the powers of your souls wakeful and active, in order to secure so vast a felicity as the gospel promiseth. I hope likewise that you will, by every friendly effort, endeavour to save the souls of your relations and acquaintance. For this purpose, "may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits. Amen."* To conclude:

If I thought it needful to make an apology to an assembly of immortals, for dwelling so long upon the subject of eternity, and being earnest in my address to them, that apology should be no other than the answer which a pious man once made to this question from his friend, "Why do you spend so much time in reading, meditation, and prayer?" The good man lifted up his eyes and hands to heaven, and said, with great seriousness and solemnity, "For ever! For ever! For ever!"

* Gal. vi. 18.

A S E R M O N

OCCASIONED BY THE

DEATH OF THE REV. PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D.D.

Who died October 26, 1751, in the Fiftieth Year of his Age.

DEDICATION.

To the church of Christ at Northampton, lately under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. Doddridge: grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

THOUGH Providence has removed me a distance from you, I share largely in those sorrows with which your minds are filled, on account of the death of your learned, pious, and excellent pastor; an event which all our churches greatly and justly lament. When he assigned to me the work of preaching the sermon on that occasion, he was sensible my respect for you, as well as for him, would not suffer me to decline it. In compliance with his desire, the following discourse was drawn up, in the best manner I could, amidst the languors of an infirm constitution, and the interruption of many necessary avocations. And it had been long ago preached among you, had not a wise Providence permitted an unhappy accident to befall me, which confines me at home. It is the most grievous circumstance in this affliction, that I am prevented from visiting you, performing the service assigned by my ever honoured friend and father, and personally suggesting to you such consolations and advices as may, in present circumstances, be peculiarly useful. To supply this lack of service, I am constrained to send you the discourse from the press: and this, I hope, will be a sufficient apology with those who may think it unworthy of public regard. It is some satisfaction to me to reflect, that discourses, on such solemn occasions, have been attended with great usefulness, especially to the acquaintance and friends of the deceased, which has often flowed, not so much from the thoughts and advices contained in them considered alone, as viewed in connexion with the awful events which occasioned them. I hope, therefore, that a recollection of the Doctor's eminent worth, and the loss his family, his flock, and the public sustain by his death, will cast a veil over the imperfections of this discourse, and fill every reader's heart with so much seriousness and tenderness, as may make way for the plain remarks and admonitions contained therein, to impress it, and, through the influences of the Spirit of Jesus, produce some valuable effect.

I cannot conclude this address without expressing my warmest gratitude to you, for all the respect and affection with which you honoured me, during the agreeable years I spent amongst you. And it is my earnest wish and prayer, that you may yet flourish, and be edified, walking in the fear of the Lord, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost : particularly that you may act upon those noble and truly Christian maxims of candour and unanimity, which your late pastor inculcated upon you, and the public, in all your future conduct, and especially in the choice of his successor ; that the Head of the church would give you a pastor after his own heart, under whom you may daily grow in Christian knowledge and holiness, and be training up for the perfection and happiness of the heavenly state. These are the daily prayers of,

My dear friends,

Your affectionate friend

and servant, for Jesus' sake,

J. O.

A SERMON.

THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH OVER DEATH.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 54.

Death is swallowed up in victory.

THE dying bed of an eminent Christian is a most melancholy, and at the same time a most delightful, scene: grief for the dominion of sin and death, and the loss we are sustaining by his removal, joy in the supports of religion he feels, and the promises of the gospel he rests upon, take place in our minds by turns, and sometimes mingle together. But in a soul formed to a relish for virtuous friendship, and deeply impressed with the great truths of Christianity, the joy will preponderate; and the pious heart will overflow with sacred delight to see the terrors of death removed, to observe how wonderfully God sustains his servants in their last conflict, and what an attestation they give to the fulness and sweetness of Christian consolations. In this instance in particular, God graciously makes his providence a commentary upon his word, and illustrates the promises of his gospel by the joy and peace he diffuses into the hearts of his dying saints. Our text has often been the means of producing this joy, and is indeed one of the most comfortable declarations that mortal creatures can hear; and the awful event, which directs my thoughts to it, confirms the excellency and suitability of it. It should certainly be regarded by all with an attention becoming dying creatures. But there are two circumstances, my friends, to recommend it to your peculiar regard, viz. that it was exemplified in the closing scenes of your late worthy pastor, so justly dear to you and to me, and that out of a particular concern for your support and encouragement, living and dying, it was his express, his last, and almost dying request, that I would discourse to you from it, on this very melancholy occasion.

The excellent and reviving chapter of which the text is a part, was intended to confute the opinion of those who said there

was no resurrection of the dead.* Their error seems to have been in asserting that what Christ and his apostles had said of a resurrection, did not refer to a resurrection of the dead, but a resurrection or renovation to a life of holiness from a state of sin, which is justly and beautifully described as a state of death. This, probably, was the error of Hymeneus and Philetus, who said that the resurrection is past already. The apostle Paul therefore sets himself to prove at large, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead: He proves it possible, from the resurrection of Christ; a well known and undisputed fact. He proves it certain, from the connexion between this fact and the authority of the apostles to publish his religion: of which this doctrine was so distinguishing and glorious a part; and also from the relation in which Christ, the last Adam, stood to mankind. And as the objections against this doctrine chiefly arose from not understanding its nature, and the circumstances of the new body, he enlarges upon these topics in the latter part of the chapter; and concludes it with a divine and most eloquent rapture, describing the glorious resurrection of the saints, (of whom alone he there speaks,) and triumphing in the prospect of this blissful event; so, says he, "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" The text is a quotation from the prophecies of Isaiah, where it is said, "He will swallow up death in victory;" and probably refers to the deliverance of the Israelites from that utter destruction, which the king of Assyria threatened, and attempted to bring upon them; a deliverance which was indeed life from the dead. It is with great propriety and beauty that these sublime and comfortable words are by St. Paul accommodated to the resurrection of the dead. The text suggests to us these two remarks, which I will endeavour to illustrate, and then direct you to the proper improvement of them.

I. Death may naturally be considered as an enemy.

II. True Christians shall obtain a complete victory over it.

I. *Death may naturally be considered as an enemy.*

This is implied in the text, when the apostle speaks of a victory; and it is expressly asserted in verse 26; "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." It is an enemy we are every one to conflict with, for there is no discharge in that war. Death is, by an elegant figure, often described in the scriptures as a person, or intelligent agent. It is emphatically styled the king of terrors, and said to reign over mankind by one man's offence. Nature and experience teach us to consider death as an enemy; for,

* Whitby, in loc.

It dissolves the union between soul and body. It dislodges the soul, willing or unwilling; and separates it from its old and dear companion. Providence has wisely implanted in every human mind a love to the body to which it is united, and a tender concern for its health; insomuch that no man ever yet "hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it." Consequently a separation must be painful. Though good men, while in this tabernacle (this mean precarious building), "groan, being burdened," yet there is a natural aversion to put it off. "Not," says the apostle, "for that we would be unclothed." It would be more agreeable to take the body with us to another world, than go through the pain and terror of dying, and have these two bosom friends divorced. This is a circumstance we would be glad to be excused from, especially as it is the consequence and punishment of sin; but death will pull down this structure, which, mean as it is, we are fond of, having dwelt in it so long, and having been at so much care and pains to keep it in tolerable repair, and will force the inhabitant to remove.

Again, death destroys the activity and beauty of the body, and turns it into loathsomeness and corruption. Diseases, its forerunners, generally consume away the flesh that it cannot be seen, and the bones, that were not seen, stick out. At length the comeliness of the body is turned into deformity, and what was an object of delight becomes a spectacle of horror. The limbs that were sprightly and active grow stiff and useless; the eyes which sparkled with life and vigour are sunk and ghastly; the learned brain, in which so many curious traces were lodged, so many ideas ranged with the utmost care, and retained by close recollection, has lost its exquisite sensibility; and the entertaining and instructive tongue is sealed up in silence. The vitals of the body have lost their powers. The lungs cease to play, and the heart to beat. The silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl broken; the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern. Then we are willing to bury our dead out of our sight; to cast the desire of our eyes into the grave, to mingle with common dust, and lie in dishonour and darkness for ages to come.

Further, death removes us from our most near and intimate friends, and other earthly comforts.

It dissolves the ties of nature, and the alliances of friendship; and breaks down the pleasing fabric of happiness, which love had been for many years erecting. The benevolent heart is ready to take up Hezekiah's mournful complaint, "I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world."

Further, it breaks off men's thoughts and purposes relating to this world, for the good of their families, neighbourhood, and the public. The great thoughts of wise and pious men for the glory of God and the advancement of religion perish; and the

charitable schemes, which depended on the continuance of their lives, are defeated.

Finally, the little acquaintance we have with the other world, to which death transmits us, increases the fear of a removal hence.

We know so little of our souls, and their manner of existence and operation without a body, and there are so many doubts and fears about their eternal condition prevailing in us, that no wonder the thought of quitting the present scene is painful, and death, as it removes us from it, is considered as an enemy.

Whose heart is not ready to fail him in the prospect? Who does not find his reason, and sometimes his faith too, ready to sink, when he is going to encounter the king of terrors, and pass through his dark and gloomy regions to an unknown and unalterable state? And in vain we call to reason, and ask philosophy to furnish us with sufficient armour of defence, and to fortify our minds against the attacks of this stern invader. It is the peculiar glory of the gospel of Christ to assist our reason and increase our faith in proportion to the strength of the enemy, and the different impressions which the apprehensions of it make upon our minds. And this it does by the discovery it makes of a future state, a glorious resurrection, and a final everlasting triumph over death.

Having thus briefly viewed the frightful features of the enemy, let us turn our eyes to a more bright and agreeable scene; and observe,

II. *True Christians shall obtain a complete victory over death.*

The text informs us that a victory shall be gained, and it shall be so complete that death may be said to be even swallowed up in it, quite destroyed and no traces or remainders of it be found. This is confirmed by the passage already mentioned, verse 26, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." The word [*καταργεῖται*] rendered "destroyed," signifies being divested of an authority it had before, and being reduced to an incapacity of exerting any further power.* Thus, after the same apostle had been speaking of persecution, peril, and sword, of being killed all the day long, as the lot of himself and his fellow Christians, he adds, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors,"—complete, glorious, triumphant conquerors. And this is agreeable to what God himself declares concerning this formidable enemy, with so much grandeur and majesty. "I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction; repentance shall be hid from my eyes."

For the further illustration of this comfortable truth, let us

* Compare verse 24, where the same word is rendered "put down."

observe, that the victory is in some measure obtained in the present life,—but it shall be perfected in the future.

1. The victory is in some measure obtained even in the present life.

Christ gained a victory in his own resurrection, and the revelation and promise of a happiness beyond the grave; for he “hath abolished death (abolished its tyranny, destroyed its force, and rendered it comparatively of none effect), and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” He has assured us of the certainty and eternity of the future state, and largely explained its nature. He has not indeed removed the natural fears of death, which are wrought into our very constitution, and are the springs of many of our actions; nor is it his intention entirely to remove from the minds of good men that fear of death, which has an apparent tendency to promote seriousness and watchfulness, a heavenly disposition, which keeps them always prepared for the coming of the Lord. But he has taken away the slavish apprehensions of it, “and delivered them, who, through fear of death, were all their life long subject to bondage.” Death hath now, in effect, changed its nature. It only hurts the body, not the soul. It only puts an end to those pursuits, employments, and entertainments, which are suited to the body, and this present world; but not to those about which holy souls are engaged, and with which they are delighted and improved. Nay, it is become, on many accounts, a benefit; as it puts an end to their temptations and conflicts, doubts and fears; as it hides their bodies in the grave, for ever shelters them from the pains and sorrows to which they are here exposed, and transports their separate spirits to everlasting purity and peace.

A present victory is obtained by the calmness with which the saints die; and that joy unspeakable and full of glory, with which the Spirit of Christ sometimes replenishes their hearts, when the flesh is sinking into the dust. Are they not conquerors, when, with smiles in their pale countenances, and songs of praise upon their quivering lips, they calmly yield to the stroke of death, and, through Christ who strengtheneth them, triumph over all its frightful powers, saying, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” Let me add, this is death’s *last* attack. It strikes once, but can never strike more; and “all the hurt it can possibly do them is to put it absolutely out of his own power ever to hurt them any more.”* Which leads me to add further,

2. The victory shall be perfected in the future world.

And this will appear, when we consider that all the faithful servants of Christ shall be raised again; their bodies shall be

transformed into the likeness of Christ's body ; and they shall be fixed in a state of complete and everlasting happiness.

(1.) All the faithful servants of Christ shall be raised again.

They are laid in the grave, but not one of them shall be lost there. Death feeds on them, but at the great day they shall have the dominion. That there shall be a resurrection of the dead, that their bodies, which are turned to corruption, shall be redeemed, and so much of each as shall be sufficient to denominate it their *own* body, collected and united by the almighty power of God, is certainly declared in the holy scriptures. We have some intimations of this in the Old Testament, upon which the Jews grounded their belief that there should be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. But it is plainly revealed in the New. "The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of Christ, and come forth." "This," says he, "is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life ; and I will raise him up at the last day." This doctrine the apostles preached ; they assured the Christians that he who raised up Christ from the dead, should quicken their mortal bodies ; that Christ was "risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept ;" of that plentiful harvest which should spring out of the dust, when the Lord should descend again from heaven. The resurrection of Christ, illustrated by the resurrection of other dead bodies, proves what God *can* do, and testifies what he *will* do. And this chapter alone will keep up the belief of this great event, till the trumpet shall sound, and the resurrection prove itself. Captivity shall be led captive, and death, which has triumphed over the whole human race, shall himself be triumphed over, when the earth and the sea shall give up their dead. Though we now say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the devouring worm, Thou art my mother and my sister, the authority and power of Christ shall at length dissolve the disagreeable relation, and the grave claim no more acquaintance with us. But, as a bare resurrection is common to good and bad ; and since, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive ; therefore we must add,

(2.) Their bodies shall be transformed into the image of Christ's body.

This is their peculiar honour ; and the apostle Paul asserts it in very strong terms ; "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." The doctrine of the resurrection was ridiculed by the weaker heathens as impossible, and represented by the wiser as undesirable ; turning the soul again into a prison, and laying upon it an insupportable burden : but the account the apostle gives us

in this chapter of the great alteration which shall be made in the bodies of the saints, answers their objections. He assures us that weakness, corruption, and dishonour shall be left in the grave; and the body be raised in incorruption, glory, and power; a spiritual body, not an animal one. And "as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." The body shall be quite refined from gross matter, be more active and sprightly, and more easily moved from place to place, than it now is, in its utmost flow of health and spirits. It shall have no gross organs to obscure the faculties of the soul, or clog its operations. It shall need no supports as it now does, nor feel any of those appetites which are often temptations to sin, and which, without resolute government, injure the health, and prevent the serviceableness of the body, as well as interrupt the tranquillity and peace of the mind. It shall have no corrupt blood or sour juices, to occasion irregular ferments, to excite the angry passions, or produce a melancholy or a fretful disposition. There will be no law in the members warring against the law of the mind, and bringing it into captivity. It will exert itself with the utmost vigour in God's service, without being wearied with it, or worn out by it. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The place, the company, the work of heaven, will all tend to increase their lustre and activity. If Moses' converse with God for a few days left such a brightness on his countenance that the Israelites could not bear to behold it, it is very natural to infer, that dwelling in the presence of God, the fountain of light, beholding the glory of Christ for years and ages, will improve the splendour of pure, spiritual, incorruptible bodies. And, it is probable, a covering of effulgent glory will be thrown over them, as there was over Christ's body when he was transfigured, and his face shone as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light; and make them shine as the brightness of the firmament. And the more they resemble Christ in moral excellency, the more will their spiritual bodies resemble his, and the more illustrious be this mark of distinction and dignity. But what is the precise nature of these bodies; how they will move and act; whether new organs will be added, or the present altered; in what manner the soul will act, and be influenced by them; are questions which we cannot solve, while we dwell in houses of clay. It is sufficient for us to know that every thing which was an imperfection, or a mark of the divine displeasure against sin, shall be entirely removed; that the body shall be so changed and new moulded, as to be every way suited to assist the holy and happy spirit to which it is reunited, in the noblest services and enjoyments. Thus, when Christ appears, every saint shall awake in his likeness, and appear with him in glory. What a noble triumph over death will

this be, when every captive shall be released, and every one clothed with the robes of glory ! Especially when we consider, (3.) They shall be fixed in a state of complete and everlasting happiness.

Of this also the scriptures of truth assure us : "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, cannot die any more ; for they are like the angels." Mortality (or that which is mortal) shall be swallowed up of life, and no traces of it left. It is a very considerable part of the glory of the heavenly world, that "there shall be no more death." Some noted commentators * would interpret the words here rendered, "in victory," for ever, as denoting the utter destruction of death. The idea is plainly suggested in the phrase, "swallowed up ;" and this truth is confirmed by the passages already mentioned, and many more in the scriptures, that not one true Christian shall be liable to the attack of death any more.

There shall be no fear of death remaining. A conquered enemy may recover his strength, assault us again, and prevail, at least so far as to alarm and terrify us ; but death is swallowed up, and has no more power to overcome or disturb the exalted, glorified servants of Christ for ever ; not so much as one of the harbingers or attendants of death shall ever incommode them. There is no fear of the return of acute pains or pining sickness ; which are often so grievous as to dispose the heart to long for death as a relief, and be glad to find the grave. Their bodies are not varnished over with an outward lustre, but perfectly free from all principles of decay. They are not only secure from external violence, but full of unfading, immortal vigour. Death has no power to take away, to molest, or even alarm, any one of their friends and associates in that better country ; but because Christ lives, they shall also live, and their duration be equal to his. Finally, there shall be no painful remembrance of death. A recollection of violent pains and cutting sorrows often gives uneasiness : "when," as Jeremiah expresseth it, concerning his own misery, "the soul hath the wormwood and gall still in remembrance," it embitters present enjoyments. But the remembrance of death shall not be terrifying, but agreeable. A comparison of the present with the former state, will only tend to enhance their pleasure ; to excite high admiration of that power which produced the surprising change, and give peculiar ardour to their adorations of that grace which prepared them for it. In short, the Lord of life shall so entirely change the scene, that all remainders of death shall be done away, and nothing shall appear by which it might be known that it ever had the least dominion over any of his faithful servants. I shall sum up all in the striking words of

* Vid. Grotius and Whitby in loc.

the apostle; "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be!" No, not yet, what we shall be then; for although our understanding is the distinction of our nature, and our tongue the glory of our frame, the one is overwhelmed when it labours to comprehend, and the other forced into silence when it attempts to describe, the objects and glories of immortality. And therefore, without presuming to take in the full meaning of the following words—"But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is,"—we may venture to conclude that we shall hereafter be blessed with an immediate, permanent, and influential vision of the Lord of life and glory; and such a vision, attended with vital beams surrounding us on every side, transfusing themselves through our whole frame, invigorating the divine life in us, and maintaining and increasing our sensible and intellectual joys, must impart complete and everlasting happiness.

Having thus illustrated the remarks founded on the text, I am now to direct you to the proper improvement of so noble and interesting a subject. Let me then entreat your attention to the following

REFLECTIONS.

1. *Let us contemplate the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so illustriously displayed in this triumph over death.*

"It became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory," to appoint his Son the captain of their salvation, and to consecrate him to that office through sufferings. He took part of flesh and blood, that he might be capable of dying, and "through death destroy him (or weaken, and render ineffectual his influence) that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" who, by his temptations, brought sin and death into the world. He died to vanquish the terrors of death, and reconcile our minds to the thoughts and approaches of it. To this work he was set apart by his Father and God; and he alone was fit for the work, and worthy the honour of overcoming the king of terrors. And because, for this end, he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, God has highly exalted him, constituted him Lord both of the dead and the living, lodged the keys of death and the invisible world in his hands, and given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to all his sincere and genuine disciples. He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet, and death, the chief and last of them, be destroyed. These, brethren and fellow Christians, are the reviving truths of our holy religion: let us then rejoice in Christ Jesus, and glory in our relation to him, who, by his atoning sacrifice, took away the sting

of death, which is sin, bore in his own body the penalty denounced against transgressors, and, by the influences of his Spirit, promotes a holy temper and conversation, which is the only proper qualification for a blessed and joyful resurrection. We are directed to consider him as "the resurrection and the life," who is to come in power and glory to judge the world; the lustre of whose appearance shall penetrate to the deepest grave, and whose voice shall awaken every sleeping saint. Then shall they come to join their glorified Head and Saviour, to attend and grace the solemnity of that day which shall complete his conquest over death, and terminate his mediatorial kingdom. Since, then, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us," let this increase our veneration for his gospel, which contains the record of eternal life; and, with an eye of gratitude, love, and humble dependence, let us look to Jesus, the Lord of life, "who, for the joy that was set before him," of being himself highly exalted, and leading on all his good soldiers to conquest and to crowns, overcame the sharpness of death, and "is now set down at the right hand of God." Let him be precious to our souls, who is the purchaser and author of eternal salvation.

2. *Let us reflect on the difference between good and bad men with regard to the consequences of death.*

This conqueror hath dominion over all: nevertheless all shall rise again. But oh! with what different appearances, and to what different states! Some shall awake to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. All shall come forth of their graves, but with this awful distinction, "they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." With what horror and surprise will the wicked lift up their heads in that tremendous day, and how glad will they be to sink back to rottenness, or even to nothing, from the wrath of the Lamb! But they must come forth, although their bodies should be so changed, as to be capable of more exquisite pain, and a more lasting duration, than their present frame will admit of. "They shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death," which shall be executed with circumstances of terror and anguish, proportioned to their crimes. On the other hand, with what a blooming air and inconceivable transport will the saints lift up their heads in that glorious day! With what unutterable delight will they leave their dusty beds, and survey their empty tombs; knowing that their warfare is accomplished, and that their Lord, whose approach they hail with the loudest hosannahs, cometh "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe!" Having through the grace of Christ, which is sufficient even for the weakest of his servants, overcome and been faithful

to the end, they shall not be hurt by the second death, they shall not die for ever, but enter into eternal rest. And do you believe, brethren, that there will be such a vast difference between the future states of the righteous and the wicked? I know you believe it. Inquire, then, what influence and effect this faith hath upon your hearts and lives; and which of these two states will be yours. Let me address you in the words of the great Mr. Howe:* “You can never justify it to God, or your own understandings, to remain in a dubious uncertainty about a matter of so vast a consequence as this. Unconcernedness here is the most unaccountable thing in the whole world. This will come to this issue very shortly with us, that either death must, as to us, be swallowed up in victory, or we be swallowed up of victorious death. With what solicitude should we all concern ourselves to be at a certainty!” If you would desire that strong consolation which the text exhibits, let me urge you to fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you, to be daily exercising “repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,” to “redeem your time,” and make a wise improvement of the present life. Thus you will finish your course with joy, and when this earthly house of your tabernacle is dissolved, you will have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Lastly, *Let the servants of Christ be calm and resigned in the view of their own death, and when their pious friends are removed.*

One would think there should be no occasion for such an exhortation as this, to any who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and have peace with God through him. One would naturally suppose that in the fulness of their hopes and joys they would desire to depart, and it would be necessary frequently and strenuously to urge them to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord. One would think that instead of sorrowing “as those who have no hope,” for them that sleep in Jesus, they should rather rejoice for the victory they have gained, and the honour to which they are advanced. But, alas! such is the unreasonable and unhappy influence which present things have upon our minds, such is the weakness of our faith and hope, so languid is our love to Christ, and so injudicious our affection to our friends, that we are loath to remove ourselves, and unwilling to part with them. God knew it would be so. He knows our frame, and remembers we are dust, and therefore pities us, and has laid in such a stock of encouragements in his word, to counteract the bias of nature, and to correct the errors of sense. Let us then, brethren, enter into the spirit, and admit the force, of them. Remember that although the combat may be sharp, and the apprehension grievous, yet the victory is sure. The

* Howe's Works, vol. ii. page 422.

enemy has been often vanquished, and 'tis only a single feeble effort he can possibly make. "Fear not," says the Redeemer, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and the unseen world." Fear not this formidable enemy. He has slain his thousands; slain, did I say? rather, he has obtained some little advantage to his own irreparable loss and their everlasting gain. Though he strips you of the body, yet, to allude to St. Paul's words, you only part with it for a season, that you may receive it for ever, improved and beautified, and no more to see corruption. Let every sincere Christian endeavour, from such considerations, to reconcile his mind to the approaches of death, and wish to encounter this last enemy, as a brave soldier does to enter upon an action, which he has the greatest reason to believe will finish the war, put an end to all his fatigues, perils, and terrors, and bring repose, honour, and reward. Frequently meditate, O Christian, on that glorious morning, when thou shalt awake, burst the bands of death, with sweet and inexpressible surprise, arise with ten thousands of thy fellow-saints, and meet thy Lord with songs of triumph, and everlasting joy upon your heads. Then shall he applaud thy resolution and labour, fidelity and patience, before his Father, the angels, and the assembled world, and give thee a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Let these considerations also support our minds when our pious and valuable friends are removed.

In this view the apostle urges them, "If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him; the dead in Christ shall rise first," and the saints then alive, being changed, "shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." And surely no words can be more full of consolation. Our pious friends departed have gained the victory, and are present with the Lord. And though we are left behind in a world, which is at best a tiresome place, and less desirable since they were removed from it; yet we hope ere long to be restored to them, to converse with them upon more agreeable and advantageous terms, and spend an eternity together. If we are "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," God will quickly call us to come up to them, and send a convoy of angels to fetch us to the world of spirits; and perhaps the first object we may meet with there, may be some of our most intimate friends, sent to congratulate our safe arrival, and conduct us to the appointed mansions. And oh! with what joy and transport shall we meet them, and be welcomed by them. The small space of time the separation has continued, and in which we have known the sorrow of living without them, will endear them to us, and in-

crease our bliss, especially when we consider that there is no fear of another separation, that the destructions of the enemy are come to a perpetual end, and that death has yielded up all his power ever to divide us more.

Let me particularly apply these consolations to you, my friends, on occasion of the sore breach God has made upon you. What joy has it already been to your late worthy and pious pastor, to meet so many of his flock in the regions of the blessed, to whom he administered these precious consolations in their last moments, and smoothed their passage to heaven. What joy will it be to him to receive one and another of you, who have obeyed the gospel, to be partakers of his felicity. What a delight will it be to him to receive your thanks for all his labours of love for the good of your souls, and join with you in adoring that grace which wrought effectually for your salvation; to which grace, you well know, he constantly ascribed his abilities and success. What joy will it afford you to meet him there; to inform him more fully than you can now do, what pleasure and improvement you have received from his labours while he lived, and his writings, by which, being dead, he is still speaking to you, with the most serious and affectionate address, and the most insinuating eloquence. And with regard to him, and all your brethren, who shall at length meet in our Father's house, how will mutual joy flow from heart to heart, when every enemy is conquered, and the tyranny of death at an end; to be for ever instructing, improving, and entertaining one another; to recount your many struggles, temptations, and victories; and trace out the wondrous steps by which you were conducted to this happiness! These friendly dispositions will be carried to the height, conversation will never grow dull, and social entertainments never cloy. Fresh delight will be springing up in his soul and yours through eternity, in observing each other's improving knowledge and holiness, and sharing together in the smiles of the Redeemer, and the work and happiness of heaven.

After such comfortable thoughts as these, I have very little heart to renew and increase your sorrows and my own, by entering into any particulars of the character of that great and good man, whom God has removed from us. Nor is it necessary I should; as he has been so long among you, and so faithfully and constantly watched over you. I may appeal to you all, that you have fully known his doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, and afflictions, and his care of the churches. He has been labouring among you with unexampled diligence, and unwearied zeal, above twenty years, with increasing honour, comfort, and success. Notwithstanding his other most important relation, as a tutor, and the weight of business he continually had on his

hands, he was in labours for your souls abundant; warning, encouraging, and comforting, with all the marks of a deep sense of religion upon his own soul, the most tender affection to you and your families, and the utmost solicitude for your everlasting welfare. The same disposition he carried with him in all his visits, and mingled the seriousness and piety of the Christian minister with the politeness of the gentleman, and the freedom and cheerfulness of the friend. His great concern for the rising generation was manifested in his discourses on education from the pulpit and the press, and his most affectionate addresses to your children in his catechetical lectures, and occasional visits. Ye know how heartily and compassionately he entered into your personal and relative afflictions; how many disconsolate hearts he has made to rejoice by his liberality, his counsels, and his prayers. Ye know his faithfulness and gentleness in brotherly reproof, and the exercise of godly discipline. In a word, ye know that, to his power, and (unhappily for his family, for you, and other churches) beyond his power, he went about doing good, piously devising, and with the most resolute application executing, so many generous designs for the public good. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how much his public addresses were illustrated and enforced by his own temper and conduct, and how holily, and justly, and unblameably he behaved himself among you. By his writings, the value of which will, I am persuaded, be continually increasing, the world will judge what a pastor God had favoured you with, and how very well you have been fed and taught for so many years. And they will naturally and justly expect that you should be wise and judicious Christians, and eminent for every branch of the Christian temper. And great will be your guilt and your shame if you are not.

But, beloved, I am persuaded better things of you; and my persuasion is founded partly on my own knowledge of your temper and character, and partly on the solemn testimony your late pastor has borne to the goodness of them, in a passage in his last will, which he desired might be communicated to you on this occasion, and which I mention with pleasure, as it is at once for your honour and your admonition. Speaking of his intention of being interred in the place of your meeting, he says, "Where I have spent the most delightful hours of my life, in assisting the devotions of as serious, as grateful, and as deserving a people as perhaps any minister had ever the honour and happiness to serve; cheerfully persuading myself that, when I am dead, they will hear me speaking in my writings with all due regard; and making it my last request to them, that those of them who have, or can borrow, my Family Expositor, will read it over in their families, once at least, beginning the Lord's day after my funeral; and that they would also read over in their families,

on Lord's day evenings, all my sermons which they have or can borrow, especially those on Regeneration, those on the Glory and Grace of Christ, the Sermons to Young Persons, and that on the One Thing Needful; and I desire that every parent that can procure them, would read in their retirements my Sermons on the Education of Children, within one quarter of a year at least after my death. And I make this request from an affectionate desire of the edification and salvation of souls; and an humble hope that, in consequence of it, I may glorify God, even when I am laid in the dust."

I hope, my friends, you will pay a serious and constant regard to this his last request, out of gratitude for his services, and veneration for his memory; from a concern for your own further credit and comfort, and a desire to increase his joy, and your own, at the day of the Lord.

As to you, my brethren and friends, who were more immediately under his eye and care, God has taken your master from your head. And you will naturally adopt the mournful words of Elisha, when he had lost his tutor Elijah, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof?" He was indeed a father to you: and I believe there are few of us, who have had the advantage of being his pupils, have found more real affection and tenderness, and a warmer concern for our welfare, in our natural parents, than we have found in him. You remember his quickness of apprehension, and remarkable felicity in the despatch of business, and yet his most exemplary improvement and redemption of time. You know how faithfully he devoted his time and abilities to your service; how freely he communicated to you out of those large stores of knowledge with which God had furnished him; how fairly and candidly he proposed arguments and objections on every topic on which he lectured; what pains he took to make you eminent Christians, able ministers of the New Testament, and scribes well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven. You will, I am persuaded, join with me in acknowledging (to the praise of God) that our acquaintance with him, and relation to him, has been our honour and our happiness. May you and I remember his paternal counsels, prayers, and example, that, through a supply of the Spirit of Jesus, we may be fitted for eminent usefulness in the church, and may do honour to his memory and instructions!

It is but a just tribute to the worth of eminently wise and useful men, and of great advantage to survivors, to display at large the virtues of their character, and point out the means by which they became so eminent; and I am not without hope that justice may hereafter be done, in some distinct account, to the distinguished abilities, eminent character, and extensive usefulness of the late reverend and learned Dr. Doddridge, who shone so conspicuously in the relations of a minister and tutor,

and whose writings are in such general esteem. In the mean time, what has been said concerning him, may serve to excite you all to aspire after a temper and behaviour becoming your relation to him, whose removal, in the vigour of his faculties, we so justly, and shall so long, lament; and, to add greater weight to the solemn exhortation of St. Paul to the Philippians, which, upon this occasion, I would address to you all: "Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in him, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."

To conclude; God has seen fit to call home his good and faithful servant; and given him not only a calm, but a joyful dismissal from the labours and sufferings of life, and enabled him thereby to triumph over death. And when we recollect the words we have been meditating upon, and this fresh seal to the truth and the comfort of them; and when by faith we look forward to that weight of glory reserved in heaven for us and our pious friends, let us even now join in the apostle's triumphant song, and say, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.

NOAH'S FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO DIVINE WARNINGS, AND HIS
PRESERVATION FROM THE DELUGE, CONSIDERED AND
IMPROVED.

A S E R M O N
PREACHED AT SHREWSBURY,

On Friday, February 6th, 1756.

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY TO BE OBSERVED THROUGH GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND, AS A DAY OF SOLEMN FASTING AND HUMILIATION, ON ACCOUNT
OF THE LATE DREADFUL EARTHQUAKES, AND THE PRESENT SITUATION
OF OUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED
A PROSE TRANSLATION OF A POEM, BY CARLO MARIA MAGGI,
ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

“Discite justitiam moniti.”

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore,
give them warning from me.”—Ezek. iii. 17.

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P R E F A C E.

It fares with books as with other vagrants ; few care to look on them, unless first satisfied what they are, whence they come, and upon what views. If the following sermon strolls into the hands of any besides the author's particular friends, the chief design of this preface is to inform them that it was far from his intention to publish a sermon composed solely for the use of his own congregation, or indeed any thing else ; as he is desirous to steal silently through the world, without unnecessarily exposing himself to its censures, or risking that share of esteem which God hath given him. But some, who heard the sermon, so earnestly solicited the publication, that he could not deny their request without appearing ungrateful to them for their faithful, affectionate friendship through several years. Many better sermons were preached on the solemn occasion ; some of them will probably be published ; and may a divine blessing accompany them ! Perhaps the plain dress in which the important truths and exhortations here proposed appear, may render them more acceptable and useful to the poor and unlearned than the more judicious and accurate discourses of my brethren on the same occasion. And if, through the divine favour, they may edify the poorest and meanest Christian who peruseth them, I shall be thankful, and think my labour in transcribing them well rewarded.

The decent, strict, and religious manner in which the fast was observed through this town, and, I believe, through the nation, may be justly considered as a token for good, that God will yet be favourable to our land ; and I cannot but consider it also as an intimation that the minds of its inhabitants are now, in an unusual degree, open to convic-

tion. I am desirous to encourage and strengthen the good impressions which, I hope, were on that day made upon many hearts. May all who shall peruse the following pages attend to their own concern in them, and criticize, not them, but their own conduct! This I may, and do, particularly expect from my own society, of whose serious attention and great candour I have had long and pleasing experience, and whom, as my beloved sons, I again warn. I am a debtor to them, and many others in the town, for much undeserved respect; and know not how to make them a better return, than to put into their hands and urge upon their hearts these seasonable admonitions and advices.

The translation of Maggi's excellent and pathetic poem, at the close of the sermon, was published (with the poem itself in the Italian language) in one of the daily papers, on the day before the fast, as a seasonable preparative for the observation of it; and it appeared so suitable to my subject, and so congruous to my design, that I chose to annex it to the sermon. I hope it may at least gratify the curiosity of those who may be disappointed in the sermon itself, and help the exhortations and motives which that contains, to come with greater force on their minds who are disposed sensibly to attend to them. I desire the prayers of my friends, that I may take the warning myself which I am solicitous to give others, and may obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful. Amen.

J. O.

A FAST SERMON.

NOAH'S FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO DIVINE WARNINGS, AND HIS
PRESERVATION FROM THE DELUGE, CONSIDERED
AND IMPROVED.

HEBREWS XI. 7.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

THE conduct of divine providence is often mysterious, but always wise. Every serious mind will reflect upon it, and grow better by the reflection. In the gentle administrations of providence, which are common, and give no alarm, there is room for much useful contemplation; but when God riseth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and produceth uncommon events of a very calamitous nature and wide extent, they at once strike the mind, give a general alarm, and it must be the greatest stupidity not to regard them. God's hand hath been remarkably lifted up to strike some nations, and threaten others. I hope the inhabitants of our land have seen it, and are heartily complying with the call of our gracious sovereign (ever watchful for his people's good) to his kingdoms to join in a public humiliation this day; as every thoughtful person must esteem it very reasonable, becoming, and beneficial. To promote your improvement of this solemnity, and the events which have occasioned it, and to assist you, likewise, in your preparations for whatever distress God may send upon our own nations, I would now recommend the example of Noah to your diligent attention and careful imitation. The apostle recommends it to you in the text, when he says, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." In which words we may naturally observe,

I. The warning given to Noah of an approaching calamity.

II. How he was affected with the warning.

III. The conduct to which it led him.

IV. The happy effects of that conduct.

After I have briefly illustrated these particulars, I will direct you to the proper improvement to be made of them.

I. Let us consider the warning given to Noah of an approaching calamity.

“Noah, a just man and upright, who walked with God, and was righteous before him in that generation, was warned of God.”* The sacred historian does not inform us how the admonition was given; but Noah, being used to receive revelations of the divine will, certainly knew the admonition came from God, and could not be deceived. He was warned “of things not seen as yet;” was informed that a deluge of water would be poured out on the whole earth. This was the more remarkable, as the rainbow’s being appointed the token of the covenant that God would not again destroy the earth by a flood, makes it probable that there had been no rain before the flood; the ground being watered by a thick dew or mist.† The calamity threatened was such as the world had never seen, and of which, as far as men could discern, there was no present sign or probability. But God warned Noah that he would send this judgment; represented the general corruption and wickedness of the world as the cause of it; and described its extent,—that it should destroy all mankind and all flesh that moved upon the earth. At the same time Noah was commanded to make an ark, or large ship, to preserve himself, his family, and some of each species of creatures on the earth, to be the seed of a new generation. Let us observe,

II. How Noah was affected with this warning.

This is described in two particulars; he believed the truth of what God declared, and had a pious fear of his judgments. He believed the truth of what God declared. “By faith Noah, being warned, prepared an ark:” faith, as the evidence, or full conviction, of things not seen: faith in the being of God, and all the revelations he made; and a dependence on his declarations, whether promising or threatening. Noah firmly believed the power of God; that he was able to send a general deluge, how unlikely soever it might seem; and his veracity, that he would certainly send it, and that God would preserve him if he followed his directions.

Further, Noah had a pious fear of divine judgments. “Being moved with fear.” That it was a pious fear appears from the effect it produced, and from the word used by the apostle in the text,‡ which properly signifies, receiving any divine revelation in the right manner. A similar word is used by this apostle, and translated “godly fear,” and it is particularly used concerning Christ, when he says, “He was heard in that he feared,” because he feared, or, as in the margin, for his piety.§ No fear but what was perfectly rational and pious could possess the heart of Christ, or render his prayer acceptable to God. Noah’s

* Gen. vi. 9; vii. 1. † Gen. ii. 5, 6. ‡ Εὐλαβηθεὶς. § Heb. v. 7; xii. 28; εὐλαβείας.

faith produced that most rational and pious fear, which excited him to obedience. He was afraid of being ungrateful to God, who had honoured him with these discoveries; of being disobedient to his commands, incurring his displeasure, like the rest of the world, and consequently sharing with them in the general calamity that was approaching. Let us consider,

III. *The conduct to which these affections led him.*

And that was, in general, to obey the commands of God; but these particulars are mentioned or implied in the text: he provided for his own safety by building the ark; though it required great pains and labour, and many hands to complete so large a vessel, and though it is probable he met with great scorn and many banters while he was about it, yet he resolutely proceeded in his work. He never asked how he should be able to finish it; how he should get the creatures in who were to be preserved; and what would become of them when they were shut in; but left all that to God. His confidence in surmounting these difficulties, and bearing the contempt of the ungodly, must have had a firm foundation, and it has so, namely, his faith and pious fear.

Further, he provided for the preservation of his family. The text intimates he was concerned for their safety. He undoubtedly informed them of the divine warning, instructed them in their present duty, and prayed with them and for them; particularly that their repentance might be promoted, and their virtues improved, by the sight of such an amazing catastrophe, and the goodness of God in delivering them from it. Once more, Noah warned the world about him. This is intimated in the text, when it is said, "he condemned the world." His holy fear reprov'd and condemned their vain confidence and presumption; his faith, their unbelief; and his obedience, their contempt and rebellion. Besides this, he bore a public testimony against their wickedness, admonished them of the impending evil, and exhorted them to repent. On this account he is called by St. Peter, "a preacher of righteousness."* And the same apostle observes that Christ, by his Spirit, inspiring and assisting Noah, preached to the old world while the ark was preparing; even those disobedient sinners, who are now spirits in the prison of hell, waiting the judgment of the great day. The ark itself was indeed a warning. Every blow of the instruments used in preparing it preached to them; but the Spirit of Christ in Noah assisted him to deliver the warning with due seriousness and solemnity. It is not improbable that Noah made a progress for several months or years about the world to give them warning. Undoubtedly he prayed for them; for he is mentioned with Job and Daniel as such powerful intercessors with God,

* 2 Pet. ii. 5.

that if any thing could turn away his wrath, their prayers would.* I am to consider, in the last place,

IV. *The happy effects of Noah's conduct.*

He and his family were saved from the general desolation; he obtained an honourable character, and was graciously accepted of God.

He and his family were saved from the general desolation. The wicked world was spared, till the instrument of their salvation was prepared. The ungodly would not believe the predictions of divine vengeance and provide for their security; therefore they were all destroyed, but Noah and his house were saved. God watched over the ark, steered its course, and brought them out of it in safety, when the flood was removed and the ground dry.

Further, Noah obtained an honourable character, and was graciously accepted of God. He is pronounced a righteous person by the highest authority and the best judge; and it is observed, that he is the first to whom the title of "a righteous man" is given in scripture. His name is recorded with honour in the Old Testament, and he is in the text placed among those worthies whose faith is so highly extolled. He also became "heir of the righteousness which is by faith;" that righteousness which is imputed to every sincere believer. He was accepted of God, as if he had been perfectly righteous, though his character was imperfect. His faith, producing sincere and cheerful obedience to the divine commands, was accepted in the room of perfect obedience. Yea the text, compared with other passages of scripture which speak of justification by faith, intimates to us that he became an heir of the happiness of the heavenly world, of that eternal salvation which was typified by his deliverance from the deluge through the ark.

I hope, brethren, you perceive, by what has been laid before you in order to illustrate the text, how naturally it may be accommodated to ourselves; to the present circumstances of some foreign nations and our own; and to the design of our present assembly. Let us then seriously apply each of the particulars suggested in the text to ourselves, and carefully weigh the force of the following

REFLECTIONS.

1. *It is our duty diligently to attend to the solemn warnings which God hath given us.* One great end of the services of this day is to impress this important truth upon our hearts. "When thy judgments are in the earth," saith the prophet, "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." When God lifts up his hand, he expects that we see it and regard its operations.

* Ezek. xiv, 20.

He hath given us many admonitions of the necessity of thoughtfulness, humiliation, and repentance ; of returning to the Lord and learning righteousness. He hath warned us by his word in general ; by his threatenings against the sinful and disobedient, against apostates and backsliders. His gospel “ reveals his wrath from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.” He hath warned us by the desolations he hath formerly made in the earth, which loudly proclaim his universal empire, power, and justice, and his displeasure against sin ; especially by those desolations which his word directs us to look upon as immediate punishments for sin, and which “ were written for our admonition,” particularly the destruction of the old world. He warns us by the monuments of that destruction, which are still to be seen. Perhaps we may reckon the high mountains and craggy rocks among these ; at least the shells and bones of fishes, which are often found deep in the ground, and upon hills, at a great distance from the sea. Every rainbow reminds us of it, and writes upon the clouds this awful truth, that “ with God is terrible majesty.” He hath warned us of late by as dreadful, destructive, and extensive earthquakes as were ever known, and in which his hand is most apparent. The particulars of these convulsions, and the desolations they have occasioned, are so well known, and you have so often been reminded of them in a public manner, that I need not, at this time, enter into the melancholy detail. These awful events display the irresistible power of God, “ in whose hand are the deep places of the earth ; who removeth the mountains and they know not ; who overturneth them in his anger ; who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble.”* How manifest the weakness of man, how unable the greatest and strongest are to resist his power, when they “ are visited of the Lord of hosts with a great noise, and with earthquake, and the flame of devouring fire.”† They display his displeasure against sin, and are solemn alarms and warnings to a guilty world. “ At his wrath the earth shall tremble.” When “ the foundations of the earth do shake,” when “ the earth is moved exceedingly,” when “ it reels to and fro like a drunkard,” it is “ the transgression thereof ” that is heavy upon it.‡ Such events show us the vanity of the world, and that the fashion of it passeth away. They warn us not to build our happiness upon this earth, the foundations of which are so tottering, but to seek an enduring substance, an unfading inheritance, a city which hath immovable foundations, and a kingdom which cannot be shaken. Though (blessed be God) we have none of us as yet seen such desolations, and few of us ever felt the shock of an earthquake, yet we have heard and read so much of them of late, that we shall be more inexcusable than the old world, if we do not

* Job ix. 5, 6.

† Isa. xxix. 6.

‡ Isa. xxiv. 19, 20.

attend to the warning. God hath spoken once and again in an awful manner, and spoken to us. When a parent corrects one child in a family, there is a language in the action; he speaks to, and warns the rest. When a magistrate executes judgment upon one in a town or county, he warns the whole. When the great King, the Lord of Hosts, visits one nation with a severe judgment, he speaks to all the earth; and the language is very plain and forcible. His word sets before us the reason and design of such judgments, and enforces the warnings of his providence. There is a remarkable passage to this purpose in the prophecy of Zephaniah, which is very applicable to our present circumstances.* “I have cut off the nations; their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me: thou wilt receive instruction.” Your ministers, desirous to approve themselves to God and your consciences as “preachers of righteousness” and faithful watchmen, have again and again given you warning, and called upon you to fear God and receive instruction. Our gracious sovereign, by his royal proclamation, renews the warning. The present crisis of our public affairs, and the prospect of an invasion and another war, so soon after the late peace, warn us all to prepare to meet God in the way of his judgments. Surely such repeated, such awful admonitions deserve the most reverent and serious regard. Nay, the scripture assures us that there is a great and terrible day coming, when God will again destroy the whole earth; that a deluge of fire shall overwhelm it, and all its works shall be burnt up. It is kind in God to give us these warnings. It is his design that we should observe them; and oh that every one of us may lay them to heart! How justly may I apply to these repeated admonitions those lively words of the prophet Amos,† “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city,” to give the alarm of war, “and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? The lion hath roared; who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken; who can but prophesy?” Who is so stupid as not to foresee himself, and to forewarn others of, approaching danger?

2. *Let us labour to have our minds properly affected with these divine warnings.* It is not sufficient, surely, to talk of them, and the events or prospects that occasion them. It is most clearly our duty to impress them deeply upon our hearts; to make them the subject of our close and frequent reflection, and to consider how it is reasonable, and how God expects, we should be affected and influenced by them. Let us then, like Noah, firmly believe divine warnings. The faith which the scripture requires, and for which Noah is applauded, is not a specu-

* Zeph. iii. 6, 7.

† Amos iii. 6, 8.

lative assent to the truth of the most weighty propositions, but a firm persuasion of their certainty, and a deep conviction of their importance. Let us, therefore, take pains to fix and preserve upon our minds a strong conviction of the hand of God in all public as well as personal calamities, though they may be supposed to happen by natural causes; for he first disposed and still manages these causes, and directs the several circumstances of their operation. Let us give entire credit to what reason and revelation inform us of God's almighty power over the whole universe, and that he can punish any nation, our own particularly, as he hath punished others. Let us steadily believe that, if we do not take the warning, but go on still in our trespasses, he will certainly visit us with one or other of his sore judgments; at least, that every particular person, who is disobedient to the admonitions of providence and scripture, shall by no means escape the damnation of hell. On the other hand, let us endeavour after a deep conviction that "righteousness exalteth" and secureth "a nation;" or that, whatever becomes of a particular nation, it shall certainly be well with every righteous soul. Let us not be governed by sense, as most men are, but labour to attain a firmness of faith, and daily pray that the Lord would increase it, that, being strong in faith, we may give glory to God, and work righteousness. Noah believed the divine admonitions and threatenings, though the judgment denounced had never happened. We shall be without excuse, if we do not believe them, when national desolations have often happened, and so lately too. Further, let us endeavour to impress our hearts with a pious fear. This stands opposed to pride and presumption, as if we were in no danger; to a careless, indifferent spirit, unaffected with the judgments brought upon others, or upon our country. It is quite the reverse of that disposition which leads to luxury and love of pleasure. These are the prevailing sins of our nation at present, and the indulgence of them is never more absurd, unreasonable, and criminal, than when the Lord hath a controversy with the nations, and is pouring out his indignation upon them. "Should we then make mirth?"* Fear is the strongest principle in human nature, and is generally the first which sets the soul in motion towards God and divine things. Encourage, then, this passion; but be careful it is not a servile, depressing fear, which hath torment; but, like Noah's, a pious holy fear; a dread of being ungrateful and disobedient to God, and falling under his displeasure. The alarms that have been given us, the dangers that threaten us, may justly excite our fears, especially when we consider how much iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold; and that the patience and goodness of God in sparing us hitherto, and using only gentle methods to lead us to repentance, have

* Ezek. xxi. 10.

not had that effect which they were intended and are adapted to produce. It may reasonably be expected that our flesh should tremble for fear of God, and that we should be afraid of his judgments. In order to promote and maintain this pious fear in your hearts, consider what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God;" whether immediately into his hands by plague, famine, or earthquake; or be given by him into the hands of our enemies. How dreadful would any of these judgments be, especially to a nation that has been so highly favoured by heaven as the British has been. If he contends with such a nation, "who can stand before his indignation? Who can abide the fierceness of his anger?" "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; Will ye not tremble at my presence?" Who knoweth the power of his anger? It exceeds our greatest fears. I would willingly encourage this pious fear, because our nation seems to be in danger of sinking through pride, confidence in an arm of flesh, despising our enemies, and forgetting God. I fear our days may too justly be compared to the days of Noah; for our Lord observes,* in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, minding nothing but worldly business and sensual delights, without any well-grounded hopes or well-directed fears, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not, and considered not, would not fear and take the warning, till the flood came and took them all away. Oh that we were wise, that we understood this, that we could consider our latter end! Hoping that your minds are in some measure affected as Noah's was, I add,

3. *Let us exert ourselves in a conduct suitable to divine warnings.* Let us imitate the example of Noah, by providing for our own safety, and for the safety of our families; and by doing what we can to save all about us. Let us first provide for our own safety. This is to be done by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and by turning every one from his evil ways. Let us consider with what sins our consciences would accuse us, if the earth were now trembling under us, and immediately put them away. To-day, while it is called to-day, let us fly to the Lord Jesus Christ, as our ark, of which Noah's was a figure. Let it be remembered that out of him there is nothing but certain destruction. Every other refuge will prove "a refuge of lies,"† as ineffectual to save us from the second death as the highest trees, towers, or hills were to save the inhabitants of the old world from the deluge. This ark God hath prepared. The door of it stands open; there is room enough for you all; Christ invites you to come to him, and he will in no wise cast you out; he will save you from sin, your greatest enemy, and from future misery, the most dreadful calamity. Flee to this ark quickly, before the door is shut;

* Matt. xxiv. 38.

† Isa. xxviii. 16, 17.

abide in it, where you will have a secure and delightful abode; and let it be your constant care to live agreeable to the encouragements and hopes which the gospel gives.

Endeavour to provide also for the safety of your families, as Noah did for the saving of his house; exhort them, watch over them, and pray for them. Take pains to excite their faith in God, and fear of his displeasure. Lead them to make serious and useful reflections on the late calamities and our present danger. Frequently admonish them not to slight the warnings of God's providence and word, nor abuse his patience and kindness. Preserve them, as far as you are able, from following a multitude to do evil, lest by partaking of their sins they also partake of their plagues; and direct them to Christ, whose prerogative, glory, and pleasure it is to "deliver from the wrath to come."

Further, do what you can to save all about you. Like Noah, warn them who are unruly, exhort one another daily, endeavour to establish those who are wavering, and encourage those who are sober and hopeful. When God's judgment on other nations, or the present circumstances of our own country, are the subjects of conversation, speak of them with seriousness and a due regard to the providence of God; that your friends and acquaintance may perceive how deeply your own hearts are affected with them, and how desirous you are to affect theirs. Preach, as Noah did, by your holy unblameable examples; by a regular easy strictness of life, commend yourselves to every man's conscience, and your example to every man's imitation, as in the sight of God. Finally, be earnest intercessors with God for others, as Noah was. Continue to pray for the nations, whom God has visited with "a great earthquake, such" perhaps "as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great;"* that they may be supported under the loss of their relations, friends, and substance; that they may be humbled, penitent, and reformed; that this desolation may dispose those who are led away by strong delusion, to hate, persecute, and destroy all who will not join in their superstitions, to desist from practices so provoking to the God of love, so contrary to the genius of the gospel of peace, and so injurious to the true interest of their country. Pray that the noble charity, which this protestant nation has shown to one of them in their deep distress, may conciliate their minds to the reformation. God can, by his Spirit accompanying his judgments, produce so glorious an effect, however improbable it may seem. May they "cast their idols of silver and gold which they made, each one for himself to worship," and all their superstitions, "to the moles and to the bats, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty," since he is "arisen to shake terribly the earth!"† May

* Rev. xvi. 18.

† Isa. ii. 20, 21.

that prophecy in the Revelations, to whatever event it immediately refers, become applicable to Lisbon and the other cities that have been shattered; "There was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand; and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven."* Pray without ceasing for our own nations and our colonies, that we may take the warning God is giving us; that we may "fear the Lord and his goodness," to which our preservation is owing, and "turn unto him before his anger break forth like fire, and there be none to quench it." But set about these important duties and friendly services immediately. There is no time to be lost. In ten minutes' time this town may be destroyed by an earthquake: in as short a space our whole island may be buried in the sea; or (what in my opinion would be worse than that) in a few months our enemies may take possession of our country, make it a province of France, and put an end to our most valuable enjoyments. Who then is on the Lord's side? who, on the side of his country? Let him without delay pursue these advices, and act consistent with the design of the present solemnity.

4. *Let us be animated to this conduct by Noah's deliverance and happiness.* Consider, brethren, that every one who, like Noah, is just and upright, walks with God, and is obedient to him in this perverse generation, shall find grace in the eyes of the Lord.† If God sees that it will be subservient to his highest good, he shall be preserved from sharing in national calamities, and have his life given him for a prey. If he should, in common with others, lose his substance and liberty, the curse and sting of the affliction will be taken away, and he will be able to "rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation."‡ However, he shall certainly escape everlasting destruction; and the overwhelming flood, which will drive the ungodly to hell, shall not come nigh him. He shall be safe in Christ, and the promises and engagements of the everlasting covenant, which was the object of his lively faith and earnest desire. The piety, zeal, and prayers of such a righteous man may contribute to the saving of the nation, or shortening the days of evil. "The innocent shall deliver the island, and it is delivered by the pureness of his hands."§ He assists in making up the breach which sin hath occasioned, and "stands in the gap before the Lord for the land, that he may not destroy it."|| He may at least be successful in saving his house, saving them from eternal death, and making them, with himself, "heirs of the righteousness which is by faith," and of the kingdom which God hath prepared for them that love him. Or if, like Noah, he should labour in vain, and the disobedience of those whom

* Rev. xi. 13.

† Gen. vi. 8.

‡ Habak. iii. 18.

§ Job xxii. 30, margin.

|| Ezek. xxii. 30.

he instructs and warns should prove invincible, he shall in no wise lose his reward. The unbelieving, the proud, and the secure may despise him as they did Noah, laugh at his fears as groundless and superstitious, his faith as absurd and enthusiastical, and his warnings as impertinent and censorious; but let them laugh on: I hope no good man will be frightened or discouraged by "the crackling of thorns under a pot," for such in Solomon's judgment is "the laughter of a fool."* And there is a time coming when they shall mourn and weep, for they shall fall under everlasting contempt; and he shall rejoice, for God will honour him. "He shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and when the proud, and all they that do wickedly, shall be burnt up, I will spare him as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."† Let these motives, as illustrated and enforced by Noah's preservation, honour, and happiness, have their weight upon your minds, and excite you to act like him. Then, whatever future scenes arise, whatever evil tidings alarm, whatever desolations come upon our country, you will be kept in perfect peace. You will hear the supreme Sovereign saying to you by his word and Spirit, as he did to his ancient people, in that passage of the prophecies of Isaiah, where there seems to be an allusion to Noah's preservation in the ark,‡ "Come, my people, enter thou into the chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

* Eccl. vii. 6.

† Mal. iii. 17.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 20.

A PROSE TRANSLATION OF AN ITALIAN POEM

OF

CARLO MARIA MAGGI,

ON THE SAME SUBJECT,

NOAH cried aloud to the perverse people,
That the bow of divine wrath was bent ;
And still more by his action than his words
He warned them ; intent to complete the ark.
But these were thought fantastic fears
Of failing age or a disorder'd mind ;
And the gay contumacy of sin
Derided the prophet, continuing its impurities.

The impious said among themselves, " For many years
The same repeated threatenings have resounded,
Yet still eternal goodness suspends the blow ;
And though the world be bad, that goodness lessens not.
Heaven is not so severe as to condemn us
To fall by its fiery bolts whenever it thunders :
Rare are the examples of divine wrath,
For, man destroyed, its altars would be lost."

Meanwhile the brutes in pairs continued entering
The finished edifice : they stand and gaze.
Obedient to the holy builder, ran
The bears, the tigers, and each fiercest animal.
He, that awhile in suspense at this sight,
Hath some suspicion of the divine scourge,
Defends himself against it by the pleasure of sin ;
And in order to fear less, becomes more guilty.

Because remorse is painful, not transgression,
He blunts that pain, and cares not for recovery ;
He hardens himself, with the callus of custom,
Against the sharp instrument intended for his cure.
With the poisoned opium of guilt
He procures a deeper lethargy and less pain ;
He goes on to sin till he has banished remorse,
And then multiplies the evil, because he feels it not.

But the ark is shut. And now with gathering clouds
The gloomy skies are pressed around on every side :
Then through the very bones of the impure
Runs a still colder frost of fear.

Yet even against such visible terrors
A veil of new deceits is sought again.
" These are," they say, " the usual clouds of winter."
Never are sophistries wanting to the obstinate.

And now, behold ! of the celestial sources
The cataracts are opened on the wicked ;

And still the wicked haste not less to sin,
In the face of that awful vengeance, now so certain.
Each one runs to the towers, to the hills, to the mountains,
And no one looks for aid to heaven above.
They would fly from the wrath—and flight is vain.
They will not appease it—and they might with ease.

Oh foolish blindness ! haughty obstinacy
Of the sin-harbours human heart !
Before divine wrath sends its arrows forth,
It shows them, shakes them, and the threat is slighted :
The guilty soul, its own worst enemy,
Will not accept the safety mercy offers ;
Nor will the wretched scorner be induced
Beneath the lifted axe to sue for peace.

He ought ; but blind affection and bad custom
Darken his reason and fetter his senses.
The just disdain of an offended Deity
At last denies him the most powerful aid ;
And if some beam of light darts on him from on high,
He shuts his eyes against it, and desponding drowns.
This is the sinner's heaviest punishment,
That the pardon he once slighted he at last despairs of.

O my maternal land ! Thine is the soil
Where my infant feet mark'd their first trembling steps ;
This is the air, so sweet to me and pleasing,
Which I first breath'd, and saluted with my early cries.
Ah ! what a black storm now hangs over thee !
Well thou rememberest—have I not foretold it ?
Thou piercest my heart—my grief is redoubled :
For I love thee the more, now I see thee in distress.

I have not indeed the gift of prophecy ;
I am one of the offenders, one of the most guilty :
Yet often have my verses urged thee
With humble penitence to beg for mercy.
I know my practice equals not my words,
And, failing in example, my precepts have been lost.
But how ? Does the Almighty scourge thy guilt,
Continually with new and severe strokes ;
And art thou not yet moved !

One messenger of evil is close followed by a worse,
And still—nay the more—thy iniquities increase :
Yet this is the time granted to provide for safety :
That thou mayst be aware of the evil, it comes gradually.
But thou slightest most the threatenings oftenest repeated ;
They grow familiar, and make thee not even pause :
And such exquisite mercy will but serve
To embitter thy ruin with a keener remorse.

Hast thou now at length corrected thy iniquities ?
Hast thou yet restored reverence to the temples ?

Thy impurities, thy frauds, thy violences,
Hast thou ever effaced by a Christian example?
That enormous luxury, hateful to heaven,
Does it even seem put away from thee in a time like this?
Rather, daily provocations increase the divine anger;
The wretch, insolent in misery, is insufferable.

The justice of God, who lives and reigns,
Sees it. And wouldst thou he should not be wroth?
That the anger thou art continually kindling
Should be extinguished of itself?
Dost thou provoke vengeance—and then sigh at it?
But what a sigh is thine? With shameful pomp
Thou honourest sin, and breathest rebellious pride.
Penitence alone can appease the Deity:
And thinkest thou to move his compassion by insolence?
Reconcile thyself to God, and in this be speedy.
Thou seest plainly now the arrow on the string:
Then from him only expect true comfort,
For he alone can make thy suffering blessed.
The earth, with its kingdoms, is subject to him;
In his hand is the fate of mortals.
Whoever in this world would feel inward peace,
Let him have no will but his who governs it.

Some sense of suffering I grant to nature:
But be it not such as to destroy duty.
If some sorrow rises from our bodily frame,
Before it reach the soul, let it exhale.
The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is:
He founded it upon the seas, and prepared it on the floods,
That he might make its changes as he wills,
Now pleasing to its inhabitants, now bitter.

By the way of suffering only we can attain
That place where every suffering shall vanish.
The path of Jesus is a path of sorrows;
Nor can his followers have truce with the world:
Such is his guidance. Whoever will adhere to him,
Let him deny himself, love the cross, and follow him.
In the way where Christ is, I make no complaint;
And if the path be rough, I look to the companion.

Let the whole world be shaken—be destroyed;
Soon will these sublunary evils end.
If, at last, we arrive at the celestial throne,
What possible harm can we feel from these ruins?
Rather, it will one day be delightful to look back
From ever-blooming flowers to these past thorns.
But it would, indeed, be a woe of indelible tincture
To go from the evils of time to those of eternity.

END OF VOL. I.



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